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REBELS AND SEPARATISTS IN ETHIOPIA: REGIONAL RESISTANCE

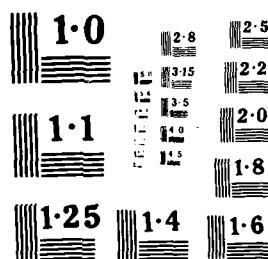
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Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia

Regional Resistance to a
Marxist Regime

Paul Henze

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This report examines the historical background, origins, present state, and prospects of a number of separatist and antiregime rebellions in Ethiopia, and discusses the implications for Ethiopia's Marxist government and for U.S. policy. The author sees no advantage for the United States in supporting any of the regional rebellions or separatist movements that are working against Ethiopia's Marxist regime as long as they aim at the break-up of the country. He advocates pursuit of policies that will lead to a change of course by Ethiopia's leaders and/or a change of leadership. The author suggests that the main elements of U.S. policy should be the following: (1) to press for basic change in overall economic policy, especially with respect to agriculture; (2) to make clear that the United States will support an Ethiopian government that adopts a new course, which the United States can do by resuming development aid on a significant scale, encouraging American private investment, and considering the reestablishment of military aid; (3) to straightforwardly uphold certain political principles, including recognizing and supporting the maintenance of Ethiopia's territorial integrity, encouraging measures that will give disaffected regions of the country a say in their local affairs, and standing ready to facilitate the mediation of quarrels with neighboring countries, including Somalia and Sudan.

R-3347-USDP

Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia

Regional Resistance to a Marxist Regime

Paul Henze

December 1985

Prepared for the
Office of the Under Secretary of Defense
for Policy



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PREFACE

This report examines the historical background, origins, present state, and prospects of a number of separatist and antiregime rebellions in Ethiopia, and discusses the implications for Ethiopia's Marxist government and for U.S. policy. Apart from traditional research methods, the author, who is a Rand consultant, has gained insights from more than twenty years' involvement in Horn of Africa affairs in U.S. government service and (since 1981) in private life. The study reflects numerous conversations with representatives of the various resistance movements, in the United States and abroad, during the past year and a half.

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SUMMARY

The Derg, the procommunist military junta in Ethiopia, has been beset from its first year in power (1974) by rebellions and self-proclaimed separatist movements. Its dogmatic efforts to force communist-style institutions and policies on a country that has little sympathy for them have provoked resistance. Over and over again, the Derg has reacted with military force even to the suspicion of resistance.

The best measure of the Derg's failure to solve its problems is the fact that with armed forces now eight times the size of Emperor Haile Selassie's, Mengistu Haile-Mariam, who heads the Derg, controls little more than half his country. Vast supplies of Soviet weaponry have not ensured elementary security. The diversion of resources to military operations has brought the economy to a standstill. Between five and ten million Ethiopians—up to a quarter of the population—are threatened with starvation and kept alive by Western relief operations.

Regional dissidence and rebellion are not new phenomena in Ethiopia. The imperial regime also had to cope with dissent and occasional rebellion, but it was much more successful than the Derg has been in dealing with them. During most of Ethiopia's long history, local leaders and the central authority have competed. Ethnic and religious factors have usually played a secondary role to regional power considerations.

In modern times, the center of political gravity in Ethiopia shifted from the north to the central province of Shoa. The advent of a Marxist revolutionary regime has not altered fundamental historical patterns. The Derg has failed to exploit religion to bolster national unity; nevertheless religious feeling has grown stronger since the revolution among both Christians and Muslims. It works in favor of national unity, but not in favor of the Derg. Marxism has failed to put down firm roots in Ethiopia. The famine, which became a subject of worldwide concern and publicity in 1984, discredits it as a prescription for achieving economic progress.

Derg failures have generated more disaffection than Ethiopia has experienced since the mid-nineteenth century. Conversely, however, the revolutionary experience has also demonstrated the strength of Ethiopian nationalism. It can now be seen to rest on more than imperial traditions or alleged Amhara domination.

The Somali invasion of 1977 provoked a genuine nationalist reaction. With more political creativity and less Marxism, the Derg could

have capitalized on this upsurge of national feeling to develop a basis for genuinely popular government. Instead, its efforts to lock Ethiopian society into a Marxist mold and its stubborn refusal to negotiate and compromise with regional dissidents have left it with no source of strength but raw power and Soviet arms.

Eritrea is not an ethnic problem. It is an issue of dissidence and frustration in a border region that gained certain advantages over the rest of the country as a result of 50 years of colonial experience. In Haile Selassie's final years, rebellion in Eritrea grew to serious proportions only because of external communist and radical Arab support. But Eritreans were always too factionalized to cooperate for long.

Ironically, the most radical Eritrean faction, the Marxist Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF), has emerged strongest on the ground in Eritrea. It finds nothing in common with the Marxist Derg and continues to demand independence, though the situation in Eritrea has long been stalemated militarily and shows little prospect of basic change. Neither the Derg nor the rebels can win. Recent developments may indicate a change in attitude—or tactics—by the EPLF. It is too early to tell.

Similarly, Marxists have since 1975 dominated the pervasive rebellion in the neighboring province of Tigre. The Tigre Popular Liberation Front (TPLF), however, favors separatism only as a last resort. It prefers autonomy and a share of power in the central government. In this we see deep historical currents at work.

The West should not evaluate rebel or separatist movements in Ethiopia without taking history into account. A Western effort to support Eritrean independence would be as frustrating an experience as intervention in Lebanon. There is no good case for it. There may be a case for modestly supporting the Tigreans to the extent that they aim at change in the center, rather than separation; however, their relationship to the Eritrean movements is unclear and their Marxism disquieting. They cannot be equated with the Afghan freedom fighters.

The Oromo Liberation Front has little on-the-ground strength in Ethiopia. With it and with other such movements, we must differentiate between the propaganda claims of exiles and actual evidence of following and impact inside the country.

Comparison with Iran offers an enlightening measure of Ethiopian viability. As in Iran, fanatic, sometimes murderous, and often inept revolutionary leaders have not destroyed Ethiopian national consciousness. The concept of an Ethiopian state, which has existed in some form for perhaps 3000 years, remains strong.

We in the West would be foolish to let the Soviets pose as champions of Ethiopian unity while we dabble with separatist movements

for unclear tactical advantages or short-term emotional satisfaction. Even at high levels in the Ethiopian government, officials are suspicious that the Soviets are cynically scheming with separatist and dissident movements to try to keep pressure on the Derg and exacerbate tensions with Ethiopia's neighbors. If Ethiopia were to break with the USSR, the Soviets could then revert to their prerevolutionary policy of supporting rebels and dissidents again.

While all Ethiopians credit the Soviets with a boundless capacity for cynicism and selfishness, the prestige of the United States and its European allies remains high. The West is challenged to find ways of exercising influence and leverage for change—change of policies and orientation by the Derg itself, if possible, or change of leadership if Mengistu is too deeply committed to the Soviets to shift direction.

The United States has credibility as a mediator of quarrels between Ethiopia and its neighbors. Settlement with Sudan—with which Ethiopia has no basic differences—could lay the groundwork in the Horn of Africa for a complete realignment toward the West. The West, and the United States in particular, is already intervening in the Ethiopian situation with massive famine relief. What logic is there in merely keeping people alive if we do not also put our weight behind serious efforts to help them improve their lot in life?

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I should like to thank Francis Fukuyama of Rand and Thomas L. Kane, who reviewed this study in draft form, for their observations, suggestions, occasional corrections, and additions. I have incorporated most of them into the text. I am grateful also to many other colleagues and friends, including many Ethiopians, who have been helpful in various ways as my research for this project proceeded.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| EDU | Ethiopian Democratic Union |
| ELF-PLF | Eritrean Liberation Front-Popular Liberation Forces |
| ELF-RC | Eritrean Liberation Front-Revolutionary Command |
| ENLF | Ethiopian National Liberation Front |
| EPDA | Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Alliance |
| EPDM | Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement |
| EPLF | Eritrean Popular Liberation Front |
| EPRA | Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Army |
| EPRM | Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Movement |
| EPRP | Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party |
| FM | Foreign Mission |
| <i>Meisone</i> | All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement |
| NDF | National Democratic Front |
| OAU | Organization of African Unity |
| PDRY | People's Democratic Republic of Yemen |
| PLF | Popular Liberation Front |
| PLO | Palestine Liberation Organization |
| PMAC | Provisional Military Administrative Committee |
| PMGSE | Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia |
| SALF | Somali Abo Liberation Front |
| TPLF | Tigre Popular Liberation Front |
| WPE | Workers' Party of Ethiopia |
| WSLF | Western Somali Liberation Front |

I. INTRODUCTION

The Derg, the procommunist military regime in Ethiopia, has been beset since 1974, when it came to power, by a bewildering array of regional and ethnic rebellions and separatist movements. How important are they? What are their prospects? Do their appeals for outside support deserve to be taken seriously?

The failure of Marxism-Leninism in Ethiopia, which has been dramatically exposed by the 1984-1985 famine affecting several million people, prompted Western policymakers to pose these and other basic questions about Ethiopia's survivability as a nation. Are the rebels and separatists essentially a response to the military junta, or do they represent deeper contradictions? If so, how irreconcilable are they?

Ethiopia has a long history. To find answers to these current questions, we have to look back into it and judge the present situation in light of it.

Ethiopia is an atypical African country. It owes its boundaries not to colonial powers but to its own inner dynamism and its rulers' ability to manipulate colonial rivals. Diverse peoples and a complex geography created conditions in which different styles of life and economic patterns exist in close proximity. Ethiopia has evolved similarly to Middle Eastern and Asian countries, or European nations at an earlier stage of their history, rather than like the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.

Ethiopia's experience of colonialism was brief. Only Eritrea, its northernmost province, was a European colony. The colonial period there lasted only slightly over half a century. The Italian invasion and conquest of the rest of Ethiopia in 1935-1936 resulted in its incorporation into Mussolini's East African empire. This empire fell apart five years later as British Commonwealth forces invaded from several directions and partisans struck from the inside. The experience of Italian colonialism for the country as a whole was essentially one of military occupation and popular resistance. It heightened both regional and national self-awareness.¹

Analogies with other countries in Africa are less enlightening in studying Ethiopia than are comparisons with similar old states with long histories, sharp regional contrasts, and multiethnic and/or multi-religious populations. The most useful comparison for the recent

¹An Oxford University Press book recently published in the United States provides an excellent account of this period: See Anthony Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War*, Random House, New York, 1985.

period may be with Iran. Section V of this study compares the recent revolutionary experience of these two countries and suggests lessons for U.S. policy from the experience of both.

After reviewing several aspects of Ethiopian history, the report surveys Ethiopian ethnicity, nationalism, regionalism, and dissidence at the time of the revolution. It then examines the causes of the rebellions and regional dissident movements that confronted the revolutionary regime and analyzes the dynamics of the most important regional dissident and separatist movements as they have evolved over the past ten years.

Finally, after comparing Ethiopia with Iran and with Afghanistan and Angola, the other two countries investigated by the project of which this study forms a part, the report discusses the factors that seem most important for gauging the future evolution of regional resistance movements in Ethiopia and proposes criteria for the United States and its allies to apply in formulating policy toward these movements.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

EVOLUTION OF THE ETHIOPIAN STATE

Does Ethiopia display the attributes of a nation-state? Or is it simply a unique indigenous African colonial empire that managed to survive into modern times? Has the revolution exposed fatal weaknesses in the Ethiopian state structure? Is Ethiopian nationalism merely the invention of the ruling classes—whether imperial aristocracy or military junta? Or does it have roots in the consciousness of the people? This report will deal with these questions and others that derive from them, for only in the perspective of historical evolution, current attitudes, and actual behavior in respect to questions of ethnicity and nationalism can one judge the numerous insurgent and dissident movements of revolutionary Ethiopia.

One of the Oldest Kingdoms

Ethiopia is unique in Africa. As a political entity, it is one of the oldest states in the world—to be compared with Egypt, China, and Iran. The Persian prophet Mani wrote in the third century A.D.:

There are four great kingdoms on earth: the first is the Kingdom of Babylon and Persia; the second is the Kingdom of Rome; the third is the Kingdom of the Axumites; the fourth is the Kingdom of the Chinese.¹

The origins of the Axumite empire, the first Ethiopian state, remain to be clarified by archaeology. The Derg abolished the Solomonic dynasty,² but the legend of the Queen of Sheba visiting King Solomon in Jerusalem and returning pregnant with Menelik I, first emperor of Ethiopia, is still depicted in paintings sold in the streets of Addis

¹Yuri M. Kobishchanov, *Aksum*, Nauka, Moscow, 1966, p. 36; *Axum*, a translation of this comprehensive work, was published by Pennsylvania State University Press, State College, Pa., 1979.

²Not with the deposition of Haile Selassie in September 1974, but in March 1975, when Crown Prince Asfa Wossen, who had been proclaimed king of Ethiopia in September 1974 but was sick in London, was declared deposed because "of failure to return to the country." The deposition of the sick king was a technicality, of course, for "Ethiopian socialism" had already been adopted in December 1974, leaving no room for the monarchy. Cautiousness about offending deeply ingrained monarchist sentiments among the Ethiopian peasantry, rather than concern with legal form, prompted the Derg to go through the charade of preserving the dynasty in September 1974. Monarchist sentiment proved weak as an active political force.

Ababa. Ethiopians, contrary to most other Africans, are a naturally history-conscious people. Like all ancient empires, Ethiopia went through periods of glory and near eclipse and some parts of its history are obscure. The idea of the Ethiopian state as remaining in continuous existence from ancient times nevertheless survived into the modern era. It survived the revolution too.

Unlike Lenin and his Bolsheviks who claimed they were founding an entirely new political structure—the USSR—that represented a sharp break with the Russian empire, Mengistu Haile-Mariam and his Derg have always insisted on historical continuity. Their original motto, *Ethiopia Tikdem* (Ethiopia First), implies a unified country. Mengistu, whose origins are in Konso in the far southwest, one of the last areas Menelik II incorporated into the modern state at the end of the nineteenth century, likes to talk about Ethiopian history, knows its general outlines well, and frequently makes historical references in his speeches.³

All other sub-Saharan African states owe not only their boundaries but their very existence to colonial powers. The Arab states of North Africa and the Middle East also took modern form as a result of foreign incursions. Many of them still lack all the characteristics of fully evolved nation-states.⁴

Ethiopia achieved recognition of its boundaries during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth as a result of the country's own political dynamism. The British simply walked away, making no effort to exert influence over the country after the Napier expedition of 1868, which put an end to the reign of the energetic but intemperate Emperor Tewodros.⁵ But Tewodros himself

³I experienced this personally in official conversations with Mengistu in February 1978. One of his most extensive public declarations is a speech delivered in Massawa during the launching of the "Red Star Multifaceted Revolutionary Campaign" on January 26, 1982. Mentioning "the famous Emperor Caleb" and Emperor Ezana "who ruled over territory beyond our present Western territorial limits up to Meroe, a fact duly evidenced on stone inscriptions," he went on to reflect "how the once glorious Axumite civilization faded away" and concluded that it was because of the decline of trade. His analysis seems to reflect familiarity with the work of the modern Ethiopian historian, Sergew Hable-Selassie, whose *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, Haile Selassie I University Press, Addis Ababa, 1972, is the most complete treatment of ancient Ethiopian history yet to appear.

⁴As defined, for example, by Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, Westview, Boulder, Colo., 1977.

⁵Tewodros has been a favorite of Ethiopian intellectuals since the end of World War II. The careers of Tewodros and Mengistu show many interesting parallels: They are both from peripheral areas of Ethiopia and from the lower strata of society. They both seized power by force. They both relied on foreign advisers and both reacted violently to opposition. Tewodros did not refrain from attacking the Ethiopian church at a time when Ethiopians were far more pious than they are now. Eventually Tewodros so

expressed the Ethiopian national spirit that had survived the long decline and political confusion that set in after the depredations of Ahmed Grag and the great Oromo (Galla) migrations.

Menelik II, who had been Tewodros's prisoner on Magdala, escaped before the battle began and returned to claim the throne of the kingdom of Shoa. Under Menelik, Shoa rapidly became the center of the modern Ethiopian state. He was still only king of Shoa when he reconquered the Rift valley lake region and the highlands of Arussi, Bale, and Sidamo, areas where imperial authority had lapsed in the sixteenth century. In 1887, he took the ancient walled city of Harar, which for centuries had menaced the Christian highlands.⁶

The Creation of Eritrea

When Emperor Yohannes IV⁷ was killed fighting dervishes on the Sudan border in 1889, Menelik was the logical and uncontested successor to the Ethiopian throne. Yohannes, a Tigrean, had tried to defend northern Ethiopia against the Egyptians and Sudanese, as well as against the Italians, who had for two decades been trying to gain a foothold on the Red Sea coast. The Italians had taken over Massawa from the Egyptians in 1885, but when they tried to move up into the highlands, Ras Alula, ruler of Hamasien,⁸ practically annihilated their forces at Dogali in 1887. In the wake of Yohannes's death, the Italians saw their chance and during 1890 took control of the whole region down to the Mareb River. Thus was Eritrea born, "an artificial creation of European imperialism."⁹

The Italians, erratically backed by the British, saw their *Colonia Eritrea* (Red Sea Colony) as a base from which to gain control of all Ethiopia. They signed a treaty with Menelik at Wichale (Ucciali) in

thoroughly alienated his people that only his household troops offered resistance to the British Napier expedition. Tewodros enjoys great popularity in revolutionary Ethiopia. A special performance of a play based on his life by Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin was staged for the VIIIth International Ethiopian Studies Conference in Addis Ababa in November 1984.

⁶Menelik II's accomplishments as king of Shoa are the subject of a detailed study by R. H. Kofi Darkwah, *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire, 1818-1889*, Heinemann, London, 1975.

⁷Subject of a biography by one of his descendants, Zewde Gebre-Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975.

⁸Subject of another recent historical study by Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa. A Political Biography of Ras Alula, 1875-1897*, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., 1982. Hamasien is the Eritrean subprovince surrounding Asmara.

⁹Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962-1978*, Hoover Institution, Stanford, Calif., 1983. This description applies, of course, to most modern African states.

1889. The Italian and Amharic texts had discrepancies, however, and the Italians interpreted the treaty as giving them a protectorate over all of Ethiopia. Menelik was not willing to accept Italian protection, as he made clear when hostilities broke out in 1895.

Menelik had enlisted the support of the French and the Russians and had built up a formidable army with European weapons and the help of foreign technicians of several nationalities. When a superior Ethiopian force routed General Baratieri's army at Adowa on March 2, 1896, Menelik sent messages to the Russian tsar and the French president "so that our friends can rejoice with us." The Italian government fell, and the European powers were shocked that "an African chief and his warriors" had defeated "a civilized European nation."¹⁰

Italian Colonization

In the subsequent peace treaty, Italy abandoned all pretense of a protectorate over Ethiopia in return for Menelik's recognition of the Italian occupation of Eritrea. Ever since, some Ethiopian nationalists have accused Menelik of forgetting the importance of this historic north Ethiopian territory and giving higher priority to rounding out his conquests on the southeast, south, and southwestern marches of the empire. Like all the ifs of history, the question of whether he could have entirely ejected the Italians from Eritrea in the wake of Italy's humiliating defeat is interesting to debate in theoretical terms, but it is the practical results of his decisions that must concern the serious historian.

By accepting Italian colonization of Eritrea, Menelik established a buffer along Ethiopia's northern boundary and brought to an end nearly a thousand years of intermittent warfare with Muslim invaders pressing in from the north. The respect Menelik won from European powers at Adowa gained for Ethiopia treatment as an equal when territorial claims of the French, Italians, and British were adjusted throughout the Somali-inhabited regions, northern Kenya, and the southern Sudan during the early years of the twentieth century.

Thus, the two serious regional problems that have bedeviled Ethiopia since the 1960s—Eritrea and the Ogaden—had their origins in the final phase of the European scramble for Africa less than 100 years ago. Haile Selassie's statesmanship was able to contain these situations despite Soviet efforts to exacerbate them by supporting insur-

¹⁰Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, Heinemann, London, 1976, p. 404. This book is the most complete and authoritative study available of Ethiopian politics and external relations in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

gency in Eritrea and by overarming independent Somalia and, thereby, encouraging Somali ambitions to gain the Ogaden.¹¹

The revolutionary regime has been much less skillful than Haile Selassie in dealing with Eritrea and the Ogaden. Despite its early turn toward the Soviet Union, the Derg has been unable to manipulate the relationship to gain advantages in respect to these crucial territorial issues. Instead, they have been exploited by the Soviets to strengthen their grip on Ethiopia. But this is getting ahead of the story. Let us turn now more specifically to considerations of ethnicity and nationalism.

REGIONALISM VERSUS ETHNICITY

In short, considerations of *regional and national power*, rather than of ethnicity, shaped the history of Ethiopia. The development resembled that through which most of the major nation-states of Europe passed as power became consolidated in the hands of rulers of a geographically favored region.

The history of Ethiopia cannot be written in terms of Amharas against Tigres and Galla versus Amhara, or of Gurages, Agaws, or Afars playing off one of the larger ethnic groups against others. Ethnic factors are present, but they are a minor theme even with a group that has recently become as self-conscious as the Somalis.

To present the development of modern Ethiopia as the evolution of Amhara dominance over the rest of the country is to project current, oversimplified notions of nationalism onto the past. To speak, as the 1983-1984 edition of the *Statesman's Yearbook* does, of "the conversion of the Amharas to Christianity in the 4th century" is absurd. The Amhara do not begin to become discernible as a people until several centuries later.

The Development of Languages

The processes by which the population of the Axumite empire evolved into separate peoples speaking Semitic languages that are clearly related but distinct can at the present state of our knowledge only be the subject of scholarly conjecture. Ge'ez, the Semitic language of Axumite times, is related to ancient South Arabian, and both were

¹¹See my "Getting a Grip on the Horn" in Walter Laqueur (ed.), *The Pattern of Soviet Conduct in the Third World*, Praeger, New York, 1983, pp. 150-186.

written in the same alphabet.¹² From this alphabet a syllabic system evolved, whereby vowels are indicated by attachments to, or changes in the form of, consonants. This syllabary, with almost no change, remains in use for all Ethiopian Semitic languages today.

The differentiation of Ge'ez (which seems to have ceased being spoken around 1000 A.D., though it remains in use in the church) into Amharic, Tigrinya, Tigre, Harari, Gurage, and other minor Semitic languages appears to have been similar to what occurred as the Romance languages developed from Latin. Spoken Ge'ez may have had many dialects. Preexisting languages left their imprint as indigenous peoples were absorbed by the dominant group. Where are the descendants of Gauls today? Among the French. Where are the descendants of the Agaw, who seem to have been the predominant pre-Semitic population of the northern Ethiopian highlands? They must have been absorbed by the Amhara and the Tigreans.¹³

"The emergence of Amharic and its early history are shrouded in almost impenetrable darkness," one of the foremost British scholars specializing in Ethiopia wrote two decades ago.¹⁴ More recently, glottochronologists have attempted to reconstruct the evolution of Amharic and other Ethiopian languages. These linguistic specialists estimate the degree of divergence between related languages by comparing basic words and projecting them backward in time to determine when the languages diverged from a common source. Definitive results cannot be expected soon.¹⁵

The earliest Amharic texts date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The restored Solomonic dynasty after 1270 appears to have used Amharic as its official language. The language spread southward as Gojjam and Shoa were Christianized and absorbed into Ethiopian civilization. The great medieval warrior emperor Amda Tseyon, who reigned from 1314 to 1344, brought southern regions as distant as Bale under imperial rule. Thus, Amharic can be said to have been the state language in Ethiopia for more than 600 years. Tigrinya, in some respects closer to Ge'ez in vocabulary and structure,¹⁶ was used only in

¹²The name is derived from *lisane giiz* (the tongue of the free). See M. L. Bender et al. (eds.), *Language in Ethiopia*, Oxford University Press, London, 1976, p. 99.

¹³Though isolated pockets of Agaw survive, such as the Bilen of Eritrea and the Qemant of Begemder, as well as the Falashas.

¹⁴Edward Ullendorff, *An Amharic Chrestomathy*, Oxford University Press, London, 1965, p. 1.

¹⁵See Bender, op. cit., pp. 23-33, 63-98.

¹⁶Amharic has been known as *lisane negus* (the language of the king) since medieval times. The fact that instruction in Biblical studies, long the sole form of higher learning in Christian Ethiopia, was always given in Amharic clearly exemplifies the dominant position of Amharic. Even Tigrinya speakers pronounce Ge'ez according to the rules of Amharic, though the Tigrinya pronunciation would apparently be more correct.

the north, where it remains today the principal language of Tigre and Eritrea.

Emperor Tewodros, admired both by modern intellectuals and the present revolutionary regime, consciously and forcefully advocated Ethiopian national revival. Though he originated in a border region that was not absorbed into the mainstream of Ethiopian life until the eighteenth century, he was an enthusiast of Amharic.

For more than a century,

[Amharic has been] clearly dominant in that it is spoken as a mother tongue by a substantial segment of the population, it is the most commonly learned second language throughout the country and it is the official language of the government and the medium of instruction in primary education. . . . Amharic is more highly developed than other Ethiopian languages, in that it has a well-established writing system and fairly well standardized norms of spoken and written usage, although its modernization of vocabulary is only barely begun.¹

Tigrinya is the only other Ethiopian language that is "moderately well standardized and in regular written use."¹⁸ It developed independently during the Italian occupation of Eritrea and the subsequent period of British trusteeship and federation. Still, it does not enjoy quantitative second place among Ethiopian languages. This position falls to Oromo (Gallinya), a Cushitic language that entered highland Ethiopia with its speakers in the sixteenth century.

Significance of the Oromo

The Oromo are probably the most numerous of all Ethiopian ethnic groups today. Unusually prolific, they moved northward in the wake of the depredations of Ahmed Gragh and within a few decades reached the traditional heartlands, Tigre and Begemder.¹⁹ (See Fig. 1—Provinces of Ethiopia.) Today, Oromo reside in every Ethiopian province except Eritrea. They form the dominant population element in Bale, Arussi, and Wollega and perhaps even in Shoa and Wollo.

Unlike the Somali, a related Cushitic people whose expansion began not long before, the Oromo were extremely adaptable. They readily abandoned nomadic cattle raising and settled into agriculture.

¹Bender, op. cit., pp. 11, 16. This description applies to the situation in the final years preceding the revolution of 1974. Since the revolution, effort has been accelerated to develop new vocabulary and standardize political and economic phraseology to accommodate "socialism."

¹⁸Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁹Begemder was renamed Gondar after the revolution.

Unexposed to either Christianity or Islam when they began to move into the Ethiopian highlands, they converted willingly.

As a rule, the deeper they penetrated into the highlands and the more rapidly they assimilated, the more the Oromo became involved in Ethiopian political life. They abandoned many characteristics of their egalitarian society and adopted those of the socially differentiated Amhara. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Oromo aristocracy participated actively in the political life and regional warfare of Shoa, Wollo, Gojjam, Begemder, and Tigre.

Except along the edge of the Great Escarpment, where they continued to lead a more pastoral life, the Oromo entered into Ethiopian politics not as an ethnic entity, but as regional contenders for power. Around Harar, where they are called Kottu, the Oromo became the dominant element among the settled agricultural population long before Menelik II incorporated the region into the Ethiopian empire in the 1880s. In the south, Oromo subgroups, such as the Arussi and the Borana, retained much of their original culture and social structure into modern times.²⁰

Though persons of Oromo origin may account for as much as 40 percent of Ethiopia's population today, the Oromo exhibit more variability than any of Ethiopia's other ethnic groups. In religion, they include groups that still follow animist practices, many people in various stages of adoption of Islam, Orthodox Christians, and converts to evangelical Christianity introduced by European missionaries. The largest of these, the Mekane Yesus church, essentially Lutheran in doctrine, is strongly entrenched among the Oromo of Wollega.²¹

The great majority of Oromo are now settled agriculturalists. Many who have obtained education pursue professions and government service. In modern times, military service, both as enlisted men and as officers, has appealed to many Oromo young men. While the Oromo language is a second *lingua franca* throughout central and southern Ethiopia, it is seldom written. Western missionaries were the first to write it. As Oromo assimilated to the dominant culture and became literate, they learned to write Amharic. This remains true today.

All these processes have been most advanced in the central province of Shoa, where the Oromo began to assimilate almost as soon as they settled in the seventeenth century. In Shoa, pure Amhara can be found today only in isolated northern regions, such as Manz and Tegulet. All other Shoan Amhara have a sizable Oromo strain in their

²⁰Eike Haberland, *Galla Sued-Aethiopiens*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1963.

²¹Gustav Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, EFS Forlaget, Stockholm, 1978, is a definitive study of the origins of this church.

ancestry. Some Shoan Oromo have abandoned their original ethnic identity and regard themselves as Amhara. As the Shoan kingdom expanded from the late eighteenth century onward, it gained dynamism from Amhara-Oromo fusion.

Modern Ethiopia rests on a combination of the two largest ethnic groups—the Amhara and the Oromo—in Shoa. Menelik II, who extended Shoa's power over the entire country and whose accomplishments include not only the victory at Adowa but most of the actions that set Ethiopia on a firm path toward modernization, had many Oromo associates. Haile Selassie's wife, Empress Menen, was the granddaughter of Negus (King) Mikael of Wollo, a pure Oromo.

The predominant tendency among the Oromo of Ethiopia has been to integrate into, not to differentiate themselves from, the Ethiopian mainstream. Throughout the long history of the Ethiopian culture, group ethnicity has mattered less than religion, historical tradition, and a sense of participation in a common cultural continuum.²² Ethiopia was, and is, far from being consolidated as a nation-state in the sense that the concept could be applied to France or England. It has more in common with Italy or Germany, whose late evolution into unified states reflected deep-seated regionalism.

Regional differentiation, rather than ethnicity, has been the principal obstacle to the exercise of strong central authority in Ethiopia:

The many centuries of settled agricultural life in the Ethiopian highlands, the long history of the Ethiopian monarchy and the Christian church in the area, had weakened tribal structures in favor of a more regionally organized society.²³

The terrain was perhaps an even more basic factor. Considering the isolation of the different Ethiopian regions from one another, separated by high mountains and deep gorges, it is remarkable that the country displayed such a marked sense of cohesion as early as it did.

Regional rulers were always selective in their subordination to imperial authority and eager to preserve large areas of autonomy for themselves. Ethnic considerations seldom took precedence over a local prince's or king's preoccupation with dominating his own area and bargaining with rivals and emperors to gain political and economic advantage. Ethnicity was too abstract a concept to carry much weight. Tribalism, as it evolved in most other parts of Africa, was important

²²Donald Levine, a social anthropologist and one of the most profound students of the Horn of Africa, has demonstrated the ascendancy of acculturation over ethnicity in *Greater Ethiopia*. University of Chicago Press, 1974.

²³Rubenson, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-32.

only around the fringes of the Ethiopian highlands. The Amhara and the Kikuyu of Kenya are not analogous in their political evolution.

RELIGION AND ETHNICITY

Even religion did not always make for commonality of interest. In medieval times, emperors Amda Tseyon and Zara-Yakob exploited the realization of being a Christian island in a Muslim sea to unify and expand Ethiopia's territory. This factor was present with Menelik II too—but less in the sense of dealing with a Muslim threat than with restoring areas that had been lost to the empire and to Christianity.²⁴ Menelik sought primarily to forestall European colonial pressure, to prevent regional rivals from gaining European backing, and to outflank other contenders for the imperial throne. Islam as such was no longer a threat in the east. The problem along the Red Sea littoral and in the region of Berbera, Zeyla, and Harar was Egyptian ambitions, which could open the way, as they did in Eritrea, to European penetration.

During the Gondarine period and the Era of the Princes, however, as imperial power atrophied, regional rulers had forged alliances against each other with little regard for who was Christian and who Muslim.²⁵ Religion and ethnic distinctions in Ethiopia do not always match neatly.

While the Oromo, latecomers to the Ethiopian family of peoples, display the greatest religious divergence, few Ethiopian ethnic entities can be described as belonging entirely to one religion or another. The majority of Amhara and Tigreans are Orthodox Christians, but there are Muslims among both and in recent times smaller groups of converts to evangelical sects, as well as to Catholicism. The Gurage, the most southwesterly Semitic group, include Muslims and Christians in almost equal proportions, as well as animists.

The religious picture among the peoples of the far southwest is complex. They have been most influenced by modern missionary activity. Eritrea has sizable groups of Catholics and Protestants as well as Orthodox Christians and Muslims. The Afar are almost all Muslim but retain many pre-Islamic practices. Somalis in Ethiopia come closest to exhibiting religious uniformity, but they, too, like Muslim Oromo in the south, retain strong orientation to local saints and

²⁴Most of them had reverted to paganism, for Christianity had not put down deep roots (nor did waning imperial power have the means of sustaining it) in the south. Nevertheless, Christian influence had penetrated deep into the southern Rift valley in the late Middle Ages. See Eike Haberland, *Altes Christentum in Sued-Aethiopien, eine Vergessene Missionsepoche*, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1976.

²⁵Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes*, Longmans, London, 1968.

mystics, who usually represent a continuation of pre-Islamic practices.²⁶

Christian-Muslim rivalry in Ethiopia has always been tempered by another historical current stemming from the time of Mohammed. In 615 A.D., the fifth year of his mission, the first group of his followers fled from persecution in Mecca and took refuge in Ethiopia. He had told them:

If you go to Abyssinia you will find a king under whom none is persecuted. It is a land of righteousness where God will give you relief from what you are suffering.²⁷

Mohammed's enemies, the Qureish, sent a delegation to Axum to persuade the emperor to give up the refugees; the emperor refused. In 628 A.D., the sixth year after the hegira, Mohammed, by then in full authority, sent an emissary to Ethiopia to ensure friendly relations. The Muslims never declared a jihad against the Axumite empire.

Far back in time as these events go, they live in Ethiopian memory and have often been cited as a basis for peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. Haile Selassie built mosques as well as churches and granted titles to many regionally prominent Muslims. The imperial government appointed a small number of Muslim Ethiopians to high government positions. The Derg has continued the practice, though it appears to have appointed fewer Muslims than Haile Selassie did.

THE DOMINANCE OF SHOA

Ethnicity had almost nothing to do with the emergence of Shoa as the core of the revitalized Ethiopian state at the end of the nineteenth century. Shoa played as important a role in modern Ethiopian evolution as Prussia did in the development of modern Germany. There are interesting parallels. Shoa was for much of its early history a frontier region, as Prussia was. Its people were a mixture of several ethnic strains, as Prussians were.

The challenge of dealing with frontier problems stimulated in Shoa the emergence of strong leadership and the development of efficient administration and military forces. Among a mixed population, concern with ethnic exclusiveness brought no advantage to those competing for leadership. Attitudes prevailing in Shoa created a favorable

²⁶J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, Frank Cass, London, 1965, provides a wealth of information on this subject.

²⁷As cited in Sergew Hable-Selassie, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

climate for the intensified and successful effort Haile Selassie made to overcome regionalism and build the governmental framework of a modern state.²⁸

To characterize Haile Selassie's Ethiopia as Amhara dominance, as many Western journalists and exile separatists have done, is to apply facile preconceptions rather than to analyze how the system worked. In the pre-Shoan era, the core of senior officials in the Ethiopian government came from Tigre or from the central Amhara provinces: Begemder, Gojjam, and Wollo. During the reign of Menelik II, the representation of these areas in the central government fell sharply.

The northern Amhara regions were severely disadvantaged during Haile Selassie's reign not only by lack of representation at upper levels of government, but as development accelerated after World War II, by lack of a proportionate share of investment and developmental priority. Table 1 gives the number of high-ranking officials (ministers, ministers of state, and vice ministers) in the central government from various regions over a 24-year period.

Table 1
NUMBER OF HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS (MINISTERS AND VICE
MINISTERS) IN THE ETHIOPIAN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT,
BY PROVINCE, 1942-1966

| | 1942 | 1948 | 1953 | 1957 | 1959 | 1962 | 1964 | 1966 | Total ^a |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--------------------|
| Shoa | 7 | 10 | 16 | 23 | 30 | 27 | 31 | 43 | 85 |
| Gojjam | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| Begemder | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Tigre | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| Eritrea | 2 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 9 | 19 |
| Wollega | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| Sidamo | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Ilubador | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Harar | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Somalia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Unknown | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 13 | 15 | 24 | 33 | 40 | 42 | 52 | 68 | 137 |

SOURCE: Adapted from Christopher Clapham, *Haile Selassie's Government*, Praeger, New York, 1969, p. 77.

^aServed during 24-year period.

²⁸"The Rise of the Kingdom of Showa and the New Christian Empire" in Mordechai Abir, op. cit., pp. 144-182; Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975.

Shoan dominance of the central government intensified during Haile Selassie's long reign, with Eritreans coming to play a strong secondary role. If data were available on Eritrean participation in other ranks of the civil service and in key technical and professional positions (telecommunications, air transport, teaching, law, and commerce), they would show a higher proportion than Shoans in some fields; the northern Amhara provinces would account for only a minor fraction of such personnel.

Shoa's position can be exaggerated. I stress it here only to dispose of the facile characterization that, in its extreme form, depicts Ethiopia as a conspiracy of the Amhara against all its other inhabitants. The predominance of Shoa has an exact parallel in the preeminence of Paris and the surrounding region in France, of London and the home counties in England, and of Athens in modern Greece. Patterns vary. Rome and Latium dominated Italy for hundreds of years during the Roman republic and empire but have not gained the same position in modern Italy. Prussia, of course, no longer exists.

Ethiopia has survived long periods when power was diffused among regions. Until early modern times, the imperial court moved seasonally from one part of the country to another. But when Menelik II chose Addis Ababa as his capital in 1886, it quickly became the hub around which Ethiopian politics rotated, and the surrounding region, the old kingdom of Shoa, took on a central role in Ethiopian life which it has never lost. Addis Ababa and Shoa *do* dominate Ethiopia. They are the melting pot of the country's ethnic strains. The revolution has changed nothing in this respect.

THE ETHIOPIAN NATION-STATE

The following were the main developments of Haile Selassie's 58-year period of dominance in Ethiopia:

- The consolidation of central power by the elimination of autonomous regional rulers and their armies and the creation of a national army
- The establishment of a modern governmental structure
- The spread of mass education and development of higher educational institutions²⁹

²⁹For a long time, the northern Amhara resisted Menelik's and Haile Selassie's educational reforms. The first modern schools, limited to Addis Ababa and Harar, had student bodies drawn largely from the poorer classes. The graduates of these schools, however, provided the new ministries established by Haile Selassie with the bulk of their trained personnel. The people of Gojjam and Gondar contemptuously referred to these administrators as "these Gallas."

- The inauguration of policies, programs, and organizations encouraging economic development
- The emergence of Ethiopia as an active factor in regional, African, and world politics
- The reinforcement of a sense of nationalism that transcended the Solomonic tradition.

The consolidation of the central government's power brought Haile Selassie into conflict with long-established regional power centers. Before the Italian invasion, he had to deal with rebellious princes in Tigre and Gojjam and assert central authority over potential traditional dissidents in other parts of the north.

During their occupation, the Italians attempted to capitalize on the resentment against centralization by restoring such leaders as Ras Hailu in Gojjam, but they had no significant success. The Patriots (guerrillas who opposed the Italians), motivated by both regional and national loyalties, cooperated with British Commonwealth forces who advanced into the country to destroy Italian power following Mussolini's entry into World War II (June 1940). By the end of June 1941, the Italians had surrendered not only in Ethiopia itself, but in Eritrea and Somalia.

Following the Italian defeat, Haile Selassie returned to Addis Ababa in triumph on May 5, 1941, exactly five years after he had fled. He found the British supportive in principle but difficult on many specific issues. They did not concede full sovereignty to Ethiopia until 1944. Rebellion broke out in Tigre in 1942 and 1943. Eritrea went through a long process of trusteeship, first enjoying unprecedented prosperity and then suffering economic depression before it was finally federated with Ethiopia in 1952.

The Eritrean problem was never regarded as an ethnic issue—the half-century Italian colonial period had not created an Eritrean nationality—it was an issue of colonial disposal and regional politics.³⁰ Only in respect to the Ogaden did ethnic considerations come into play, but they did not take precedence. The British did not withdraw from there completely until 1954. Some British officials favored severing Somali-inhabited regions from Ethiopia and creating a Greater Somalia.³¹

³⁰The complexities of this situation, in which the Soviets also attempted to assert their hand, are chronicled in a work fundamental for anyone who wants to understand the Eritrean issue today: G. H. K. Trevaskis, *Eritrea. A Colony in Transition, 1941-1952*, Oxford University Press, London, 1960.

³¹Richard Greenfield, *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, Praeger, New York, 1965, pp. 286-290; I. M. Lewis, *The Modern History of Somaliland*, Praeger, New York, 1965, pp. 116-165; John M. Drysdale, *The Somali Dispute*, Praeger, New York, 1964. See also The Earl of Lytton, *The Stolen Desert*, Macdonald, London, 1966.

III. REBELLIONS BEFORE THE DERG TAKEOVER

THE WEYANE REBELLION, AUTUMN 1943

Decline and Disaffection in Tigre

Though rich in the remains of Axumite civilization and (along with the Eritrean highlands and the coastal plain south of Massawa) the region where the first Ethiopian state arose, the heavily populated province of Tigre (see Fig. 2) suffered both economic and political decline, along with ecological degradation, from the medieval period onward. In fact, in terms of both social and political conditions, life in Tigre remained more medieval than anywhere else in Ethiopia into the twentieth century.¹ The Tigrinya language, though generally regarded as closest to ancient Ge'ez, was used for neither historical monuments nor written literature and thus fell far behind Amharic in development. The oldest text that has come to light dates from the nineteenth century.²

Tigre experienced a brief political renaissance during the reign of the Tigrean emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889), but basic political patterns remained unchanged. Politics revolved around leading families whose power had been established centuries earlier. "In essence it differed only marginally from what had been the general order in Ethiopia during the 'Era of the Princes.'"³ The only new element from the 1890s onward was the Italian presence in Eritrea.

The Italians regarded Tigre as the avenue through which they would eventually advance to take possession of all of Ethiopia. As a result, until the fascist invasion,

practically all the leading figures of the province, at one stage or another, openly or secretly co-operated with Asmara [i.e., the Italian colonial administration] against the authority of Addis Ababa. Collaboration . . . did not stem from a separatist instinct or a modern sense of Tigrean nationalism. Rather, it was always a means of obtaining promotion at home within the traditional Ethiopian power

¹This thesis is developed convincingly by Haggai Erlich in "Tigre in Modern Ethiopian History," *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, East Lansing, Mich., 1984, pp. 327-330.

Amanuel Sahle, "Tigrinya: Recent History and Development," *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, pp. 79-90.

Erlich, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

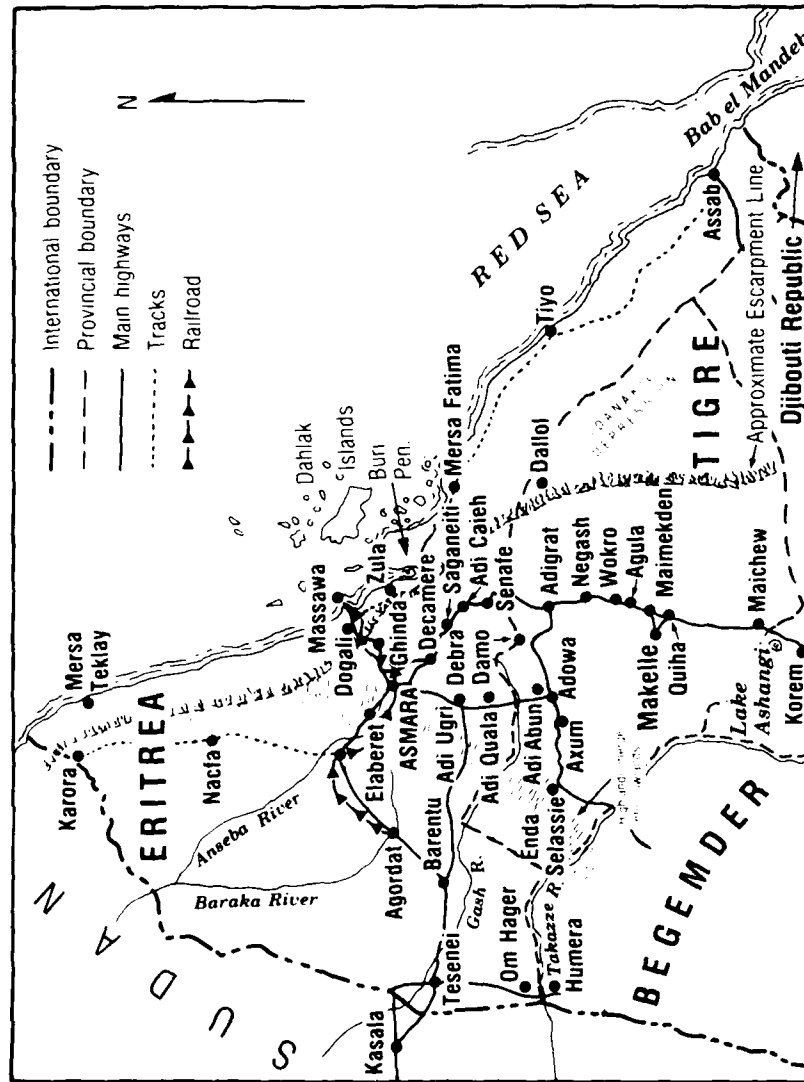


Fig. 2 — Eritrea and Tigre

game. Taking money and arms from the Italians usually aimed at maintaining support and creating a nuisance in the eyes of Addis Ababa. In a way, it was a sophisticated variation of [banditry]—obtaining power by not serving superiors properly but through becoming a greater annoyance. Indeed the ultimate goal of the Tigrean chiefs co-operating with foreigners was to eliminate local rivals in order to be recognized as Tigre's *negus* by Ethiopia's emperors. The Shoans . . . unable to force an Ethiopian centralist government on Tigre, chose to promote local jealousies and rivalries.⁴

When the Italians invaded in 1935–1936, several Tigrean leaders, as well as the entire Raya and Azebu Galla (Oromo) population of the southeastern part of the province, supported them. After the defeat of the imperial forces, Tigre was incorporated into Eritrea. The province did not develop much during the Italian occupation. Politics continued to operate in the traditional mode. Some leaders shifted allegiance and supported the Patriots.

After defeating the Italians in 1941, the British occupied Tigre as well as Eritrea. Some British military officers favored retaining the connection with Eritrea, but the restoration of Ethiopian sovereignty made that impossible.

Haile Selassie's Tax on Tigreans

Haile Selassie sought not only to reassert the authority of his government in Tigre, but to extend it and thus complete the process he had begun before the Italian invasion.⁵ He moved quickly to appoint a new provincial administration and establish troops in the province under central government command. Traditional forms of tribute were abolished and a new tax system was introduced.

Though publicized as a guarantee of tenure, imperial taxation met resistance from the greater part of the peasantry. Few peasants had paid taxes during the Italian occupation, when much of the province had been out of the control of any effective administration. During those years, bands of Patriots, locally recruited Italian auxiliaries, troops loyal to local leaders, and bandits had all roamed the region and compelled the population to support them when they had it in their power.

Tigrean peasants, thus reluctant to accept any authority, could have been won readily to the emperor's new system only by an efficient and rational bureaucracy. The officials and military commanders ap-

⁴Ibid., p. 328.

⁵Marjory Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia*, Faber & Faber, London, 1969, pp. 343–352, 356–358.

pointed from Addis Ababa were more often than not inefficient and rapacious. A local poem of the time expressed the prevailing attitude:

Woe, woe, woe—death unto the officials of today
Who abuse their authority for a kilo of grain
And destroy documents for the gift of a goat.
The emperor is not aware of these scandals,
But surely he has sent us hyenas to all places.⁶

Government Clashes With Dissidents

Serious trouble first developed among the Raya and Azebu and the Wejerat, peoples with a long history of resistance to authority and complicated relations with the Tigrean nobility.⁷ Some Tigrean nobles, wanting to retain as much regional autonomy as possible, opposed Haile Selassie's consolidation of authority in their province. The British military was eager to see security reestablished in Tigre and sometimes encouraged local leaders to assert themselves. The British were unmindful, however, of the complexity of the political relationships among which the Tigreans were operating, both on the provincial level and with respect to Addis Ababa.

In a serious clash in January 1942 at Kobbo, three British officers and several Ethiopian soldiers were killed trying to force the Raya and Azebu to pay taxes. The area was subjected to aerial bombardment to little effect. The rebellious tribesmen were defeated only after a four-month campaign lasting from April to July 1942 and requiring 30,000 troops, including 5000 from Wollo and Shoa, who were traditionally regarded as enemies by the Tigreans.

Large tracts of country were devastated and severe fines in both livestock and money were imposed on the defeated Raya and Azebu. Severe as this campaign was, it had no serious deterrent effect on the rest of Tigre. Security conditions throughout most of the province worsened during the remainder of the year and tax arrears accumulated.

⁶Cited by Gebru Tareke, "Rural Protest in Ethiopia, 1941-1970: A Study of Three Rebellions," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, 1977, p. 147. Much of my discussion of the Weyane rebellion is, in effect, a summary of this extremely useful work, which is based both on British and Ethiopian documentary sources and interviews carried out in Tigre in the 1970s. The Weyane revolt has attracted very little attention from Western historians, even those interested in revolt and rebellion. Richard Greenfield, e.g., in his *Ethiopia. A New Political History*, Praeger, New York, 1965, gives it half a page (p. 285).

⁷See Gebru Tareke, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-158.

The central government responded by bringing in more non-Tigreans, primarily Shoans, and encouraging further use of force. The next major clash came with the Wejerat, who are Christian, unlike the Raya and Azebu, who are predominantly Muslim. The Wejerat periodically raided the lowland Muslim Afar for cattle, adding to the general instability in the region. Moreover, they refused to pay taxes.

A large force led by a Tigrean subprovincial official acting in the name of the central government attacked the Wejerat in May 1943 and was defeated. The commander was taken prisoner and, in accord with Wejerat tradition, dressed like a woman and kept in detention until July. The defeat badly undermined the Addis Ababa government's authority and the standing of Tigrean leaders cooperating with it.

Emergence of Rebel Leader

Open resistance broke out all over eastern Tigre under the slogan, "There is no government; let's organize and govern ourselves."⁸ Local assemblies, called *gerreb*, were established. The *gerreb* sent representatives to a central congress, called the *shengo*, which elected leadership and established a military command system.

The leadership of the eastern Tigrean rebellion quickly crystallized around Haile Mariam Redda, a young man of peasant origin who had become an outlaw (*shifta*) after the Italian occupation. The Italians coopted him and in 1938 put him in charge of his native parish, Dandiera, in Fnderta. Removed from that position after the Italian defeat in 1941, he appealed in Addis Ababa but was rebuffed. Returning to his native region, he again became an outlaw, a Robin Hood type who won support among the peasants by protecting them from bandits and corrupt officials.

Haile Mariam's political program was essentially a conservative one:

He accused the Shoan Amhara aristocracy of having impoverished Tigre and destroying its institutions by ranging the Tigrean nobility against each other. He attacked them for having . . . accused the Tigreans as unpatriotic and less nationalistic than the Amharas while they sold the latter's lands to foreign powers—presumably a reference to Eritrea. He dismissed the emperor as a coward who had betrayed the country and thus was unfit to rule. He . . . accused him of being an agent of the Catholic church. . . . He vowed to liberate Tigre from Shoan Amhara hegemony if the central government failed to respond to the call of the rebels and . . . reform itself."

⁸Ibid., p. 175.

⁹Ibid., pp. 185–186.

Many of Haile Mariam's commanders were Tigrean nobles. The rebels were well armed, for the Italians had distributed large quantities of weapons to presumably friendly Tigrean peasants during their occupation. Haile Mariam established his headquarters at Wokro, an old settlement north of Agula on the main north-south highway. Located at the geographic center of the province, this town boasts a famous ancient rock-carved church.

The rebellion enjoyed the support of the Orthodox clergy. All elected officials were required to take an oath administered by a priest. Haile Mariam condemned Catholics, Protestants, and officials who smoked and wore long pants as alien intruders and an outrage to tradition.

Rebel Attack on Government Forces

Haile Mariam, an effective military leader, had a natural gift for delegating authority and inspiring cooperation. He used the rainy season of 1943 to organize his forces. After celebrating the Ethiopian New Year on September 12, they went on the offensive. Their first victory was a hard-fought attack on the besieged government garrison at Quiha, a key junction on the main highway south of Wokro.

The rebel forces, estimated at 20,000, moved westward from Quiha to Enda Yesus, a fort overlooking the provincial capital, Makelle. They captured the fort and then took Makelle.¹⁰ The representatives of the central government fled. Haile Mariam issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of Makelle which stated, *inter alia*:

Our governor is Jesus Christ . . .
And our flag that of Ethiopia.
Our religion is that of Yohannes IV.
People of Tigre, follow the motto of Weyana.¹¹

By September 20 the successful Weyane rebel army was ready to turn south to face an Ethiopian force attempting to advance into Tigre. Haile Selassie had ordered his minister of war, the Patriot guerrilla leader Ras Abebe Aregai, to take charge of the campaign against Haile Mariam's rebels. The Ras rushed northward and arrived at Korem, south of Maichew, on September 17. His way was blocked by rebels,

¹⁰I have described this region, with historical references, in Chapter 3, "The Old Heartland, Tigre and Eritrea," *Ethiopian Journeys*, Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1977, pp. 63-104.

¹¹Cited in Gebru Tareke, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190. The name Weyane comes from a traditional Tigrean game. It connoted resistance and a sense of unity. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

including large elements of Raya and Azebu, who here were on their home ground.

During the next three weeks, the Weyane forces fought hard against Ras Abebe's Ethiopian troops, who were bolstered by a small contingent of British officers and specialists. The fighting centered on the great natural fortress of Amba Alaji. It had been the scene of two bloody encounters during the previous eight years: during the Italian invasion when both aerial bombardment and poison gas were used against the poorly armed Ethiopian imperial forces and again when the British and Ethiopian Patriots defeated the Italians in 1941.

End of the Rebellion

The Weyane forces outnumbered those of the government, but their advantage in numbers was offset by artillery and British air power. As the struggle dragged on inconclusively, disagreements surfaced between Haile Mariam and some of the other Tigrean leaders. Haile Mariam nevertheless maintained discipline, and on October 6-7, he precipitated the final decisive battle by launching a three-pronged attack on government positions with perhaps 10,000 men.

Interviewed in 1974, Haile Mariam contended that his forces could have won by exhausting their opponents had it not been for the artillery and the air attacks.¹² A British officer observed at the time:

The bombing was accurate and inflicted considerable casualties which had their effect in undermining the rebel determination. Quite apart from the actual casualties inflicted, however, after one or two attacks the appearance of the aircraft alone was sufficient to cause concentrations of tribesmen to disperse. Ground troops were thus enabled to move forward and occupy key places without opposition.¹³

Although the rebels scattered and battle formations began to disintegrate on October 7, uncertainty still affected the Ethiopian government forces and Ras Abebe did not personally move out of Korem until October 9. He then moved systematically northward and entered Quiha and Makelle on October 14, capturing the erstwhile rebel headquarters at Wokro on October 17.

The emperor subsequently appointed Ras Abebe governor of Tigre and charged him with the pacification of the province. The pacification was brutal. The Raya and Azebu suffered the most severe punishment, having all their lands and animals confiscated. Ten Weyane leaders who were caught were sent to Shoa and imprisoned at Debre

¹²Ibid., p. 196.

¹³British after-action report cited in *ibid.*

Berhan. Haile Mariam Redda himself did not surrender until 1946. He was exiled to Ilubabor and then Gamu Gofa for 20 years. In 1975, the Derg appointed him head of the militia in Tigre.¹⁴

Tigre still remembers the Weyane rebellion.¹⁵ Its memory plays a role in the rebelliousness that has characterized Tigre since 1975. Let us conclude this brief summary of the Weyane rebellion by reviewing how ethnicity and nationalism were reflected in it.

Rebellion as a Reflection of Tigrean Regionalism

Tigrean regional pride and particularism primarily motivated the rebellion; separatism as such played no part. The Tigrean rebels considered themselves as good Ethiopians as the Shoans, whose domination they resented. Traditional conservative religious orthodoxy predominated. Muslim rebels participated with Christians.

Oppression, corruption, maladministration, and non-Tigrean leadership engendered Tigrean resentment. This resentment seems at times, however, to have turned into opposition to all outside authority. Many Tigreans preferred the traditional tribute system to a more modern, unified tax system. Some would rather have lived with the autonomy and near-anarchy to which they had been accustomed for nearly a decade than adjust to a stable and orderly administration.

Tigrean society seemed to lack class tensions of the kind that Marxists like to dramatize. The people did not question the existing social structure, perhaps because traditional Tigrean patterns of land ownership and generational interrelationships provided adjustment up and down the social scale.¹⁶

Loyalties were to local communities, traditional leaders, and leading families. Such loyalties gave the rebellion great strength as it gathered force but made the movement brittle when the rebels met sustained resistance and frustration. Thus spectacular victories were followed by quick and devastating defeat.

The rebellion's leader, Haile Mariam Redda, shares with a long line of rural insurgent heroes stretching far back into history in many parts of the world certain conservative populist qualities, but he was not an ideologue or ethnic nationalist. Interviewed in 1974,

¹⁴Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁵As the extensive personal interviews conducted by Gebru Tareke in the mid-1970s for his study of the revolt demonstrate. See also *Horn of Africa*, Vol. VI, No. 4, 1983/84, a special issue devoted to Tigre.

¹⁶See Dan F. Bauer, *Household and Society in Ethiopia*, African Studies Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, 1977; also the same author's "Land, Leadership and Legitimacy Among the Inderta Tigray of Ethiopia," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, 1973.

[Haile Mariam Redda] admitted that he only spoke for the plight of the poor and the peasant and that he never entertained severing Tigre from the rest of Ethiopia or restoring its dynasty. Moreover, he may not have considered becoming *negus* [king], but the people expressed it in one of their songs as: "You, the youthful Haile Mariam / Today you are a *shifta* / But next year king."¹⁷

The Weyane rebellion was local. It drew on no outside inspiration, either material or ideological. Allegations of British encouragement and meddling—whatever the attitudes and ambitions of individual British officers and officials may occasionally have been—cannot be taken seriously. After all, it was in large part because of prompt and effective British support to Haile Selassie's forces that the rebellion was so quickly put down.

BALE AND THE OGADEN IN THE 1960s

Soviet Involvement in the Horn

Two problems of regional dissidence that flared into insurgency in the 1960s—the Ogaden and Eritrea—would have been of little consequence without foreign support. The relative ease with which the imperial regime was able to contain them can be appreciated only in retrospect and in contrast to the disastrous performance of the revolutionary government in trying to deal with these same problems. Haile Selassie's reputation as a Pan-African and world statesman served Ethiopia well in confronting these situations. It also served as a deterrent to Soviet ambitions. The Soviets backed both the Somalis and the Eritreans but took precautions to hide their involvement behind a facade of respectability.

The Soviets have shown deeper interest in Ethiopia than in any other part of Africa.¹⁸ The USSR quickly established a diplomatic presence in the country after 1941, even at a time when Stalin was locked in a life-and-death struggle with Hitler. During the 1950s, the Soviets marked time in Ethiopia. During the 1960s, a Soviet program for destabilizing Ethiopia and gaining a foothold in the Horn of Africa gradually took shape.¹⁹

¹⁷ Gebru Tareke, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹⁸ Edward T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa Before World War II*, Holmes & Meier, New York, 1974; Paul B. Henze, *Russians and the Horn*, European-American Institute for Security Research, Marina del Rey, Calif., 1983; Stephen T. Hosmer and Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Policy and Practice Toward Third World Conflicts*, Lexington Books, D. C. Heath and Company, Lexington, Mass., 1983.

¹⁹ I have discussed this program in detail in "Getting a Grip on the Horn" in Walter Laqueur (ed.), *The Pattern of Soviet Conduct in the Third World*, Praeger, New York, 1983, pp. 150-186.

The USSR invested heavily in arming Somalia after it gained independence (1960) and tacitly encouraged Somali-backed insurgency in southeast Ethiopia. By the end of the 1960s, the Soviets, competing with the Chinese, were through surrogates supporting insurgency in Eritrea and, employing low-cost clandestine techniques, were working to radicalize Ethiopian student movements both within the country and in Europe and North America.

The extent to which the Soviets helped bring Nimeiry to power in Sudan (spring 1969) and Siad Barre in Somalia (fall 1969) is still being debated.²⁰ Whether out of commitment or opportunism, they quickly stepped up arms shipments and catered to both these leaders' proclivities to seek military solutions to gnawing problems: the southern rebellion in Sudan and Somalia's irredentist claims against Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. Support for the Eritrean insurgency increased dramatically, with Sudan as the main channel. Cuba played a secondary role as source of training and propaganda support.

Haile Selassie was still capable of creative diplomacy, however. Informed in advance of the U.S. opening to communist China, he took a prestigious delegation to Peking in October 1971 and agreed to recognition in return for abandonment of Chinese support for the Eritreans. Nimeiry, meanwhile, had narrowly escaped being ousted by Sudanese communists who mounted a coup against him in summer 1971. He quickly modified his pro-Moscow stance and proceeded to make peace with the southern rebels with the active assistance of Haile Selassie who, in turn, persuaded the Sudanese to restrict support for the Eritrean insurgents.²¹

During most of the 1960s, Haile Selassie found the Ogaden a more threatening problem than Eritrea. The two situations did not have significant feedback effect on each other during Haile Selassie's time, as occurred after the Derg came to power. It may be useful to look back briefly at the way in which the Bale-Ogaden problem developed to understand what happened in this area in the 1970s.

The Creation of Bale, 1960

The modern province of Bale was established in 1960, when the area was separated from the province of Harar. Hararge remained Ethiopia's largest province in area. Bale is its second largest, but its most thinly populated. No census had ever been taken, but some

²⁰Gabriel Warburg, *Islam, Nationalism and Communism in a Traditional Society. The Case of Sudan*, Frank Cass, London, 1978, pp. 120-140; Gary D. Payton, "Somali Coup of 1969: The Case for Soviet Complicity," *Horn of Africa*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1981.

²¹Warburg, *op. cit.*, p. 138, pp. 160ff. Henze, *Russians and the Horn*, p. 19.

official estimates put the population in the 1960s below 200,000. No estimates were larger than one million—for an area the size of England.²²

Three-quarters of Bale's inhabitants are estimated to be Oromo. They live in the largely forested northern highlands, where Ethiopia's second highest mountain, Batu, rises to 14,360 feet. The vast central and southern regions of Bale are savannas that slope gradually to the border of Somalia. This area has for at least three or four centuries provided grazing grounds for Somali nomads. Bale may have been the original home of the Oromo, but for several generations, perhaps longer, Somali have been advancing westward through Bale into Sidamo, the neighboring province to the west, where they have occasionally clashed violently with the Borana Oromo.

Dissidence in the Ogaden

Ogaden is a geographical expression, not an administrative region. The term applies to the entire lowland area of Harar and Bale provinces. It is semidesert, though traversed by several rivers that begin in the eastern highlands and seasonally carry a large volume of water into Somalia. The most important of these is the Webe Shebelle, which has its sources in the high mountains of northern Bale and southern Arussi.

The rivers of the Ogaden have considerable potential for irrigation, but historically there was almost no cultivation in the valleys. The Ethiopian government and foreign aid donors initiated modest agricultural development projects in the 1960s. In Somalia, the lower Webe Shebelle valley was opened to agriculture during the Italian colonial period.

The Somali Youth League, founded in 1943 after the British defeated the Italians, first articulated territorial claims to the Ogaden. It somewhat influenced Ethiopian Somalis during the British occupation, which continued until 1948 in the main portion of the Ogaden and until 1954 in the Haud, the region directly south of then British Somaliland. Britain had "hesitated long enough to offend the Emperor but without being able to justify her own continued retention,"²³ but finally returned to Ethiopian control the entire area that had been

²²For a summary of estimates, see my *Ethiopian Journeys*, pp. 213, 234.

²³Perham, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiv.

recognized as Ethiopian under the colonial boundary arrangements negotiated during the early twentieth century.²⁴

Ethiopian control of the Ogaden was, however, extremely tenuous. The region had few roads and few settlements that could be dignified with the designation town. Names on the map were often no more than weekly market sites, otherwise uninhabited. Its sparse population and lack of readily exploitable resources gave it low priority for economic development. While the Somali were primarily nomadic camel and goat herders, the Oromo were cattle herders and cultivators. The latter often lived in large villages "walled" by thick hedges of candelabra euphorbia and surrounded by tilled fields and open pasture-land.

As the Addis Ababa government resumed control of the area, friction developed between the Oromo peasantry and Amhara officials who sought to impose taxes and exact services. The arrival of Amhara settlers caused further strain as local grazing and land rights were often arbitrarily abrogated. Northern Bale had (and still has) vast expanses of fertile, uncultivated land to which the central government claimed title by right of conquest at the end of the nineteenth century. Retired soldiers were prominent among the settlers attracted to the province by grants of government land.²⁵

An amalgam of circumstances—the gradual extension of central government authority, the influx of Amhara officials and settlers, mostly Christian, and the creation of a small but in the local context apparently privileged Orthodox church establishment—resulted in the gradual accumulation of local resentments. The indigenous population was almost entirely, though often somewhat nominally, Muslim,²⁶ and "we-they" attitudes were deeply entrenched. Corruption and abuses by settlers more often than not went unpunished. Bale did not attract the best administrators in the overextended imperial civil service. The

²⁴S. Pierre Petrides, *The Boundary Question between Ethiopia and Somalia*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983.

²⁵Overpopulation and overuse of agricultural land in Ethiopia's northern highland provinces is a major factor contributing to the severe famines of the 1970s and mid-1980s. The famines were anticipated by both Ethiopians and foreign aid specialists in the 1950s and 1960s. Their predictions led to plans for massive resettlement of northerners in thinly populated southern Arussi and northern Bale. After initial reversal of this policy, the post-1974 revolutionary government has reverted to the same practice, but instead of encouraging individual settlement has set up state farms and built new settlements for the peasant laborers who work on them.

²⁶Muslim influence in the area extends back perhaps a thousand years, but many pre-Muslim practices have survived and been amalgamated into Islam. Ethiopia's most popular Muslim pilgrimage site, the tomb of Sheikh Hussein, is located on the Webe Shebelle in northern Bale.

central government gave Bale low priority and the Ogaden as a whole even lower.

Nevertheless, had it not been for the establishment of an independent Somalia in 1960, insurgency would have been unlikely. Though a sense of grievance among the Arussi Oromo gradually increased, their interest lay in the avoidance of exploitation by Christian Amharas and the management of their own affairs, not in separatism.

As the central government built up a provincial bureaucratic structure and local administration in Bale, conflict with the local population grew. The problem is age-old and has its parallels in many developing societies. Circumstances in Bale did not differ greatly from those elsewhere in southern Ethiopia.²⁷ The reason similar situations did not produce rebellion and insurgency in other southern Ethiopian provinces was that it was not in the interest of any neighboring country to organize, finance, and arm them.

Somali Intervention

A group calling itself the United Liberation of Western Somalia was set up in Mogadishu (Mogadiscio) simultaneously with establishment of the Somali Republic. The group included all of Hararge, Arussi, Bale, and southern Sidamo in its definition of Western Somalia. It is not clear whether the organization was replaced or simply evolved into the Ogaden Liberation Front that announced its existence in 1963.

The new Somali government gave asylum to disaffected Somali, Oromo, and other Ethiopians. As word of this got back, it encouraged dissidents to look to Mogadishu for support, as did Mogadishu's intense radio propaganda. Mogadishu agents became active in the Ogaden and Bale. Arms were smuggled in.

Revolt broke out first in an ethnic Somali area, Elkere, in 1963. Rebel groups were organized in each subprovince, often under the leadership of local notables. A general offensive began in 1964, with attacks on police stations in Oromo regions.

The Addis Ababa government moved to stem peasant discontent by announcing liberalized arrangements for reclaiming confiscated lands and settling tax arrears, but bureaucratic processes were complicated and delays created new grievances between the peasantry and the authorities. It was a situation ripe for exploitation.

²⁷"The relative cohesiveness of the ruling group of northern origin in the southern provinces—and the mutuality of interests between officials, landowners, and clergy within this group—reinforces the power of the provincial hierarchy. The social distance between this group and the local peasantry renders the power of the officials more awesome, and its limits less discernible, than is the case in the northern provinces where officialdom is an integral part of the society it governs." John M'arkakis, *Ethiopia. Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974, p. 299.

The Somalis had meanwhile trained a cadre of insurgent leaders, foremost among them an Oromo named Wako Gutu, who was given the rank of general. Subprovincial leaders were designated colonels. By early 1965, the whole region was in a state of high tension as a result of rebel attacks on police stations, militia posts, and local government offices and harassment of highway traffic.

During 1965, several settlements and road junctions fell to the insurgents. Government forces were thrown off balance. In March 1966, the governor of the subprovince of Genale and a sizable entourage were surprised by a rebel band, and the governor was killed.

As the year drew to a close the rebels clearly had the upper hand; the greater part of the province had undoubtedly come under their influence or control. Government effectiveness was largely confined to the towns in the highlands, but even these [were unsafe] and . . . Goba [the provincial capital] . . . was attacked twice by rebel forces.²⁸

Addis Ababa declared martial law in Bale, as well as in the neighboring Borana region of Sidamo in December 1966. Ethiopia openly accused Somalia of supporting the rebellion; it had ample intelligence evidence. To downplay the potential for conflict between Somalis and Oromos, the Somali government encouraged the insurgents to emphasize Islam as a common denominator and picture their struggle as a jihad against Christian Amhara domination.

Hundreds of insurgent cadre were trained in Somalia in courses lasting from three weeks to several months and sent back into Ethiopian territory. Rebel movement in and out of Somalia could not be prevented because control of so long and distant a border was beyond the capabilities of the Ethiopian military. By this time, Somalia had acquired mortars, land mines, bazookas, and light artillery, as well as a wide range of hand weapons—largely from the Soviet Union. These were provided liberally to insurgent units.

Ethiopian Mobilization to End Rebellion

Ethiopia had little trained manpower available for deployment to the south because demands in Eritrea were growing. The government therefore mobilized territorial units and recruited local militia from among Christian settlers. A Christian Oromo general, Jagama Kello, was put in charge of the effort to defeat the Bale insurgents. In the face of more coherent Ethiopian military operations, the guerrillas became *more professional*, too, avoiding pitched battles and attacks on well-defended positions.

²⁸Gebre Tareke, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

The rebels concentrated on daring hit-and-run raids. In a surprise attack in Borana in 1967, they inflicted heavy damage on Ethiopian forces. During the following year, as government efforts increased, the rebels continued to display both strength and daring. They probably achieved their maximum effectiveness, with perhaps 12,000 to 15,000 fighters, in early 1969:

*Rebel performance was so astounding that some of the government high officials even entertained the notion of external influence other than Somalia. . . . The minister of defense explicitly stated: "The manner the bandits operate in Bale, their aim, cruelty and meticulous performance indeed exemplify the communist spirit and action which the rebels seem to have embraced as a religion."*²⁹

Several developments helped the government turn the situation around. Most important was a lessening of support from Somalia, because Prime Minister Mohammed Ibrahim Egal's government had decided to concentrate on internal development and reduce tension with both Kenya and Ethiopia. The effect of this policy was not immediately apparent, for the insurgents had been so generously supplied that they could maintain their momentum even with a slowing of Mogadishu's logistic support.

During the latter part of 1968, the Ethiopian air force began bombing rebel strongholds and livestock concentrations. At the same time, a newly appointed governor-general of the province adopted a program of dividing the rebels from the population by attacking corruption and moving energetically to deal with peasant grievances. Both carrot and stick had effect, however, for aerial bombardments struck terror into peasants who had supported the rebels and encouraged disengagement from them. A British army engineer unit flew in to build a bridge across the Genale River, greatly facilitating the mobility of the Ethiopian forces.

When rebels began to surrender at the end of 1969, the movement quickly lost its momentum. Somali Chief of Staff General Mohammed Siad Barre's military coup in Mogadishu in October 1969 had further weakened Mogadishu's support for the insurgency in Ethiopia. Retreat from the conflict was accelerated by the new Somali government, which chose to concentrate on internal priorities. Ironical as this may be in view of Siad Barre's adventurism a few years later, it demonstrates how quickly the flow of the tide of history can change in the Horn of Africa from one direction to the opposite.

²⁹Kebede Gebre to Direessie Dubale, February 28, 1969, as cited in *ibid.*, p. 326.

By February 1970, insurgent "General" Wako Gutu, retaining barely 200 armed men under his command, was ready to negotiate. The Ethiopians surrounded him in Arana, an isolated area south of Mt. Batu, and his surrender was agreed upon. He and his fighters were pardoned on condition that they return to peaceful life. Haile Selassie subsequently granted Wako a title and a commission in the Ethiopian army.

Pacification and Conciliation

The government's conciliatory policy in Bale was underscored by the appointment of General Jagama Kello as governor and of several other Oromos and Somalis to other positions. The pacification of the province and of most of the Ogaden was completed by 1971.³⁰

Although a few guerrillas may have remained at large in isolated areas during the next year or two, they did not challenge the government.³¹ The government, in turn, resumed small-scale land grants for settlement of retired Ethiopian soldiers and made modest efforts at economic development. Somali adventurism in the Ogaden had been costly to all concerned, but had achieved no permanent results.

Ethiopian students in Europe asserted that the struggle in Bale was continued by an organization growing out of the United Liberation of Western Somalia which in August 1971 supposedly transformed itself into the Ethiopian National Liberation Front (ENLF). In 1973, an exile spokesman claiming to represent the ENLF insisted that Oromo and Somali were still united in a struggle against the imperial regime, and the student journal *Tegelachin* periodically reported on it.

We have no evidence that the ENLF ever had any reality in Ethiopia itself.³² It may simply be another example of the seminotional resistance movements that Soviet operatives who were supporting dissident Ethiopian students and Marxist intellectuals were directly or indirectly encouraging them to promote.

³⁰Compromise and conciliation as a conclusion to conflict are more characteristic of this part of Africa than fighting to the finish and humiliation of those who concede defeat. Ethiopian history provides many other examples. There is also some parallel between the termination of the insurgency in Bale in 1970 and the manner in which Nimeiry settled the southern Sudanese rebellion two years later.

³¹I trekked on horseback into the region around Mt. Batu in early summer 1972 over a route that had been used by the insurgents less than three years earlier. Memories of rebel activities were alive among local Oromo, but conditions were entirely peaceful. see *Ethiopian Journeys*, pp. 221-224.

³²Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1975, pp. 219-220, has a good summary of the Bale-Ogaden insurgency but exaggerates the importance of the ENLF. Gebru Tareke has a more realistic discussion of it, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-350.

ERITREA IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

An Unsuccessful Federation

To relate the history of the Eritrean problem with organizational and tactical detail would require a book. It has inspired the production of a large body of literature, most of it polemic, infused with passion for or against the Eritrean separatist cause and lacking in both historical perspective and hard data.³³ One good book on the Eritrean problem which has appeared in recent years, Haggai Erlich's *Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962-1978*,³⁴ enables the nonspecialist to ignore all the rest. Those who would learn more of the historical background can consult another excellent study by the same author, as well as several other good books.³⁵

Had disposal of the former Italian colony reached the international agenda in the 1960s, Eritrea probably would have been set up as an independent country, as so many insignificant and less developed colonial remnants in Africa were at that time. After what seemed an interminable process of trying to determine the wishes of the majority of the people, UN commissioners and the concerned great powers settled on federating Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952. This was not an illogical move, for the Eritrean highlands and coast are clearly part of historical Ethiopia.

Eritrea did not exist as a concept until the Italians set up their colony. It is a geographic and ethnographic miniature of Ethiopia: highlands, deserts, lowlands, fertile regions, and barren mountains (see Fig. 2, above). The insurgents recognize nine nationalities and even more languages within the province. Its religious makeup is equally complex, with Christians, Muslims, and animists dominating some regions but also intermixing in others. Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants are all represented among the Christians. Religious and ethnic lines do not always coincide. On almost any count, in a comparison of

³³Examples in the scholarly mode include Bereket Habte Selassie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1980; and Richard Sherman, *Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution*, Praeger, New York, 1980, both of which I reviewed in "History and the Horn," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1983.

³⁴Hoover Institution, Stanford, Calif., 1983.

³⁵Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa*, Michigan State University, East Lansing, 1982; Stephen H. Longrigg, *A Short History of Eritrea*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1945; A. J. Barker, *Eritrea 1941*, Faber & Faber, London, 1966; and G. H. K. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, 1941-1952*, Oxford University Press, London, 1960.

the two in many respects similar areas, Eritrea comes out more complex than Lebanon.³⁶

The wonder then is not that federation did not work, but that the pretense was maintained as long as it was. Politically and economically, Eritrea was more developed than the rest of Ethiopia. A good case can be made that the imperial government never wanted federation to succeed.³⁷ When it was formally terminated in 1962 with Eritrea's incorporation as Ethiopia's 14th province, a liberation movement had already existed for four years.

Exile Liberation Movement

The Eritrean liberation movement consisted of an insignificant group of exiles, predominantly Muslim traditionalists, who had sympathy but no strength in their home territory. They were, despite efforts to represent themselves as a united front, always rent by tensions and rivalries reflecting those in Eritrean society itself.³⁸ Life in Eritrea was little affected by exile activities or insurgency until radical Arabs and various Soviet proxies began to support Eritrean dissidents.

In the late 1960s, insurgents operating from across the Sudan border began raids and assassinations in Eritrea and hijacked Ethiopian Airlines planes. They were among the first to engage in systematic air piracy and may have been encouraged to do so by Cubans, who, along with the communist Chinese and Syrians, were then training Eritreans in guerrilla techniques. The economic stagnation that set in after the closing of the Suez Canal created a sizable pool of educated unemployed from which insurgent leaders could recruit. Nevertheless, the majority of Eritreans during this period remained oriented toward Ethiopia, where they had the advantage of superior education and skills in a larger, expanding economy.

Despite intense exile rivalry, insurgents expanded their operations on the ground. By 1970, they were fighting pitched battles against Ethiopian forces. Israeli advisers helped the Ethiopians organize police commando units, but the Ethiopian army took over and began a process of continual alienation of the civilian population by brutal search

³⁶Lebanon's troubled modern history and the tribulations of all the outside powers who have become involved in the country in the past two decades—Israel and the United States above all—should stand as a warning to those who advocate Western intervention to support the separatists in Eritrea.

³⁷Haggai Erlich, "The Eritrean Autonomy 1952-1962: Its Failure and Its Contribution to Further Escalation," in Y. Dinstein (ed.), *Models of Autonomy*, Transaction Press, New York, 1981.

³⁸Shumet Shishagne, "Notes on the Background to the Eritrean Problem," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Seminar of the Department of History*, Vol. 1, Addis Ababa University, 1984, pp. 180-206.

and destroy tactics. In this respect, an ethnic factor did come into play in Eritrea: Officers and enlisted men were primarily from the center and south of the country.

Still, no more than half of the imperial regime's military forces of 45,000 were ever deployed in Eritrea. American military installations were never attacked and a relative stalemate, with all the province's cities and main roads in government control, set in after Chinese support was terminated and Sudanese supply lines contracted at the end of 1971.

Qaddafi embraced the Eritrean rebel cause warmly after he came to power in 1969; Syria also continued to support the insurgency, funneling in supplies from Soviet-related sources. But the Soviets stayed in the background. They may even have shifted their expectations in the early 1970s to much longer-range goals, preferring that the Eritrean insurgency, should it eventually succeed, result in the establishment of a Marxist state rather than an Eritrea where Muslim influence would be strong.

Eritrean political movements were always fragmenting and regrouping. The Muslim-dominated Popular Liberation Front (PLF) had been established in June 1970. Prospects for a quick outcome of the Eritrean struggle were receding when the Marxist Eritrean Popular Liberation Front was formally proclaimed in February 1972. The Soviets must have welcomed it, but avoided open endorsement of it. They had plenty of surrogates to work through.

Before we follow Eritrean developments further into the 1970s, we have to look at the larger Ethiopian context in which they occurred.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

A Sense of Impending Change, 1972

A sense of impending change pervaded Ethiopia in summer of 1972, when Haile Selassie passed his 80th birthday. Aspirations for accelerated progress spread to ever widening sectors of the population. These aspirations, which were not sharply focused, revolved around expectations that a more open political system would be sanctioned by an imperial successor who would reign as a genuine constitutional monarch.³⁹ The educated and politically alert segment of the

³⁹Crown Prince Asfa Wossen, not a forceful personality, was widely expected to succeed his father as a matter of course, as the constitution provided. He encouraged the widespread expectation that he would liberalize the political system.

population looked forward to political parties, ministerial responsibility to parliament, a less restricted press, and broadened scope for interest groups of all kinds.

Modernization in Ethiopia had always taken the general direction of European and American models, though Ethiopian traditions were also valued and respected. Traditional behavior patterns persisted even among those who considered themselves fully modern.⁴⁰ There was great dissatisfaction, nevertheless, with overcentralization of authority in the imperial court. No one, not even the students and few intellectuals who professed Marxism, consciously advocated a more authoritarian system.

As the revolutionary process gained momentum in early 1974, a majority of articulate Ethiopians, had they been polled, would probably have agreed that they wanted a more open society, broadened educational opportunity, faster economic progress, and more room for local and regional initiative. These views were contradictory in that the population continued to look to a strong central government as initiator of new activities, as the source of local status and privilege, and as arbiter of demands for resources and attention among competing groups.

Most societies display such contradictions. What is most significant about Ethiopia as its revolution began is that there was no coherent pressure for total replacement of the existing political and economic system.

Varied Populations and Life Styles

Styles of life differed dramatically. The population ranged from nomads and primitive forest dwellers barely out of the stone age to settled highland groups with traditions extending back to biblical times to modern city life with most features of everyday existence in Europe or America. Most Ethiopians still lived in rural areas, the majority in long-established communities that had evolved complex rules of behavior, some surprisingly flexible and democratic, some much more authoritarian.⁴¹ Tribalism as known in much of the rest of Africa was relatively benign in Ethiopia. Regional links often outweighed tribal or ethnic loyalties in importance.

⁴⁰These were not perceived as contradictory by most Ethiopians, who seem to have regarded their country as susceptible to modernization in the Japanese style, with its cultural uniqueness preserved.

⁴¹Detailed studies of different Ethiopian peoples include Donald Levine, *Wax and Gold*, University of Chicago Press, 1965 (Amhara); William A. Shack, *The Gurage*, Oxford University Press, London, 1966; D. Hallpike, *The Konso of Ethiopia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972; Asmarom Legesse, *Gada*, Free Press, New York, 1973 (Oromo).

Christian-Muslim interactions remained localized and relatively untroubled. There was no cleavage comparable to that between the Muslim North and Christian South in Sudan. Ethiopian nationalism was by no means absent among Ethiopian Muslims. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church had a strong residual influence on many features of life. Modernizers criticized its lack of social consciousness and missionary zeal. Islam was advancing more rapidly than Christianity among animists.

While energetic young men deplored the fact that the Orthodox Church was sunk in tradition and failed to exploit its immense land holdings, few questioned the notion that Ethiopia was essentially a Christian country with traditions going back to the fourth century and fusing with an earlier Judaic heritage. Ties to Israel, though pragmatically justified on diplomatic, military, and economic grounds, rested on a deeper emotional base.

Throughout Haile Selassie's long reign, Shoans continued to exercise political leadership, and the role of the central province as the source of both governmental leadership and economic dynamism steadily increased. The Oromo, though in aggregate the largest single nationality group in Ethiopia, were so widely dispersed geographically, varied in religious affiliation, style of life, and degree of modernization that there was little comprehensive sense of nationalism among them. Those of Bale and Arussi played little role in the national political system, while the Oromo of Wollega were, in effect, junior partners with the Shoans in the leadership of the country.

Peoples living in the eastern and southeast lowlands—the Afar and the Somali—were among those least affected by modernization, education, and extension of governmental authority. Economic development, except in the Awash lowlands and to a much lesser extent in the lower Webe Shebelle valley, had barely touched these regions. Authority was still exercised mostly through cooptation of traditional leaders by the central government. The Sultan of Aussa, the principal Afar leader, enjoyed high status with the emperor.

Along the western border and throughout the south and southwest, small tribal groups occupied special ecological niches, specialized in certain crafts and trades, and intermingled with others in accordance with unwritten rules and customs that had evolved over millenia. The coffee-growing province of Kaffa enjoyed a high degree of prosperity. Some of the traditional leaders from the preconquest period retained administrative authority here. Education and modernization offered young people from the entire southwest a relatively open path to assimilation into broader Ethiopian society.

Rapid urbanization, a phenomenon affecting primarily Addis Ababa, Asmara, Diredawa, most provincial capitals, and several southern towns (Nazareth, Shashemane), had not produced serious social tensions. It had, however, encouraged intermingling of nationalities and religious groups. Inter-marriage across tribal, national, and even religious lines was increasingly common in such settings.⁴²

⁴²Eritrea was in some respects a special case—though much of what has been said above applies to it too. It will be discussed separately below.

IV. ETHIOPIA UNDER THE DERG

THE DERG TAKEOVER, 1974

Thus, the society over which the Provisional Military Administrative Committee (PMAC), which rapidly became known as the Derg,¹ established dominance in summer 1974 was not one in which ethnic or religious tensions had become volatile. Nor did festering social strains confront the government with quandaries that demanded immediate solutions. Besides, a framework existed for dealing with problems that surfaced during the months when the imperial regime fell into confusion.

Institutions through which influential groups could express themselves functioned tolerably well: labor unions, teachers' associations, student groups, and business and professional organizations. The countryside did not experience any mass upwelling of peasant discontent. Until mass arrests and killings began, the unease and uncertainty that characterized Ethiopian society as the authority of the imperial regime withered did not automatically lead to violence. The revolution remained good-natured until late 1974 and expectations of a peaceful transition to a more dynamic and open political system remained high.²

The Derg made no attempt to adapt and exploit the existing constitutional framework. It dismissed parliament, but called no new national congress or consultative assembly to listen to the advice of the "broad masses" in whose name it claimed to be acting. At the provincial and local level, as imperial officials were removed or fled, lines of authority that could have been preserved were severed. The Derg soon found itself at odds with labor leaders and teachers' representatives.

The revolutionary process unleashed competing and disparate forces seeking greater influence or advantages for their groups. The Derg showed no skill in channeling their energies or encouraging competition among them. The sweeping reforms decreed during 1975 to implement "Ethiopian socialism" had the effect of stirring up society from above at a time when it might otherwise have settled down.

The effect of the Derg reforms was heightened by a series of events during fall 1974 relating to Eritrea. The manner in which the Derg tried to deal with the Eritrean problem—the single most important

¹The word, which means committee, was not in use in prerevolutionary Ethiopia. It was coined from a Ge'ez root.

²The most complete account of the first three years of the revolutionary period is David and Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution*, Africana, New York, 1978.

political challenge it faced on taking power determined the subsequent course of events in Ethiopia. A different approach to Eritrea could have meant a different history for Ethiopia from 1974 onward.

THE DERG AND ERITREA

Active insurgency in Eritrea was ten years old in summer 1974. Almost every feature of the situation offered better prospects of solution at that time than had been true at any period in the previous decade. Eritrea was bound to test the political skill of any new Ethiopian government. The declining imperial regime's failure to take advantage of the relatively favorable situation it had been instrumental in bringing about from fall 1971 onward contributed to its downfall. The Derg, despite favorable prospects, failed even more decisively than did the imperial regime.

During 1972 and 1973, Ethiopian military forces extended their control over all major towns and roads in Eritrea. Military brutality against the civilian population was common. But the economy improved and the provincial administration was able to organize an impressive province-wide exposition, "Expo 1972," that ran for several weeks in Asmara that spring.

Politically the situation remained stalemated on the government side. Although Chinese support had ceased and Sudanese supply lines contracted, Qaddafi warmly supported the insurgent cause and Syria continued to funnel in supplies from Soviet-connected sources. Cuba continued to train Eritrean fighters and engage in propaganda action on their behalf. But the Soviets appear to have hedged their bets on Eritrea, shifting emphasis to the long-range political struggle rather than encouraging maximum guerrilla exertions during a period when the "objective situation" on the ground was not particularly favorable.

The Marxist Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF) was formally proclaimed in February 1972 as a "unified" competitor to the "revolutionary command" of the older Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF-RC).³ Though the Soviets avoided an open link with it, it seems to have represented the hard core of their Eritrean strategy during this period. Like all Eritrean movements, however, it lacked cohesive leadership and was susceptible to fragmentation, for it was actually a coalition of disparate elements:

Haggai Erlich explains the complexities of these Eritrean factions as well as anyone has been able to do briefly in his *Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962-1978*, Hoover Institution, Stanford, Calif., 1983.

Endless internal rivalries arose from the pluralist nature of Eritrea, with each faction having its own interests. In essence, the ELF-RC seemed to be a western Eritrean organization combining young, local fighters with the older members of the Supreme Council. The EPLF was a marriage of convenience among Christian highlanders, coastal Muslims and another faction of exiles. The situation was made even more complex by the network of personal rivalries and religious, ethnic and other differences.⁴

Politicking among Eritrean exile leaders and the propaganda that they broadcast from various Arab capitals magnified the impression of the size of the insurgency. The best estimates of separatist fighters of all factions place their number at no more than 2000 in the early 1970s.

In effect, the situation boiled down to a stubborn but unimaginative Ethiopian government trying to subdue fractious coalitions of insurgents motivated by little more than political adventurism and sustained by foreign money and supplies. Neither side did well. Neither side had leaders with the breadth of vision to attempt to escape from a vicious cycle of petty maneuvers.

Opportunity for Settlement, 1974

With the opening of the Suez Canal following the 1973 Yom Kippur war, an upsurge in economic activity in Eritrea could have been expected. An Ethiopian government capable of both decisive military action to reduce the insurgents to hit-and-run operations and a creative political approach, with sustained negotiations and concessions to local desires for self-administration, could have brought the Eritrean insurgency much closer to real settlement. This was the opportunity open to the Derg at the end of summer 1974.

When Haile Selassie was deposed, an acting head of state was required. A distinguished Ethiopian general of Eritrean origin, Aman Andom, was chosen. On Derg recommendation, Haile Selassie had appointed him chief of staff in early July. Before the end of the month, he had become Minister of Defense. He seemed like a logical choice as a front man for the Derg. He had made a name for himself as a Patriot, but also as a champion of the common soldier, in fighting against Somali-backed insurgents in the Ogaden in the mid-1960s.⁵

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

⁵He had also commanded Ethiopian contingents in Korea and the Congo. Aman's credentials as a liberal nationalist were ideal for settling the Eritrean problem. These credentials also caused the EPLF leaders to fear him.

During spring and summer 1974, expectations of a negotiated settlement had grown in Eritrea, for the population was eager for peace and stability. Unfortunately, rivalry between the EPLF and the ELF-RC had grown in exile and spread into Eritrea, where Christian Tigreans, newly recruited to the Marxist EPLF, began an assassination campaign against persons regarded as collaborators with the now almost defunct imperial government. Several prominent Muslims were killed. Such violence worked against compromise.⁶

As minister of defense, Aman had devoted much of his time to his home province and traveled extensively there. He returned to the capital on September 9 to present a 19-point plan to solve the insurgency calling for

general reform of the administrative system, removal of all obstacles which had impeded social progress . . . amnesty of political prisoners in Eritrea, return of exiles and their resettlement, promotion of foreign investments . . . lifting the state of emergency, punishing officials guilty of misconduct in Eritrea . . . [and] safeguarding Ethiopian unity.

Aman hoped to persuade Christians in the EPLF to cooperate with the government against the predominantly Muslim ELF. He had a broad concept of Eritrean reconciliation and managed to have Christian Eritreans appointed as both governor-general of the province and chief of police. But the Derg was not behind him—Maj. Mengistu Haile-Mariam opposed conciliation and Eritrean leaders in exile rejected Aman's proposals. The two, in effect, collaborated to block progress toward settlement. Meanwhile the Derg appointed Gen. Teferi Banti, an Oromo hard-liner on Eritrea, as commander of military forces in the province. Mengistu encouraged Teferi to pursue the rebels vigorously.

⁶The fact that it was primarily the work of groups calling themselves Marxists may be evidence of Soviet desires, being transmitted through surrogates, to heighten tension in hopes of accelerating the revolutionary process in Ethiopia. It might reflect the same activism characteristic of Soviet programs to support anti-Western subversion and terrorism that was by 1974 apparent in many areas in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. The extreme fractiousness of the Eritrean movements nevertheless argues against the notion that the Soviets were able to manipulate them through what would in all likelihood have had to have been surrogates.

Cited in Erlich, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

The Derg's Lost Opportunity

By mid-October 1974 a serious rift had developed between Aman and hard-liners in the Derg. The situation in Eritrea had become politically supercharged. On October 13, 1974, 20,000 to 30,000 citizens gathered at a rally on the edge of Asmara to support peaceful settlement. Ethiopian military units began flexing their muscles. Osman Salih Sabbe, leader of the ELF-RC, called from Beirut for intensified offensive action by the insurgents and warned that the Eritreans would encourage ethnic groups in Ethiopia to rebel and create anarchy. Thus positions hardened among both major factions of exile leadership as Aman's moderate approach generated concerted opposition in the Derg.

While Gen. Teferi Banti prepared for a new military campaign in Eritrea, Mengistu mobilized Derg members against Aman. By mid-November the clash between Mengistu and Aman was in the open. Addis Ababa radio on November 18 quoted Mengistu as having referred in a recent speech to "the few guerrillas who had been maintaining a state of insecurity in [Eritrea] for the last 13 years, with the collaboration of foreign countries."⁸ Aman had concentrated on the Eritrean problem to the exclusion of organizing support in Addis Ababa and Harar. Mengistu outmaneuvered him.

On November 23, 1974, Mengistu sent troops to Aman's house to arrest him; a firefight ensued and Aman was killed. That night, 59 former imperial regime officials who had surrendered during the previous summer and who had been held for investigation and possible trial were also summarily shot. General Teferi Banti was subsequently named chairman of the Derg and acting head of state.

The hard-liners had won on Eritrea, and the Derg's uncompromising policy both strengthened the Eritrean insurgent movements and propelled the entire Eritrean population into a more negative position toward the Addis Ababa government than had ever developed during the imperial period. Reacting to Ethiopian military preparations for an offensive, several hundred insurgents infiltrated Asmara on December 22 to demonstrate with violence their determination to liberate the province. In early January, the Derg's police commissioner in Eritrea, an Eritrean, defected to the insurgents and persuaded the two major groups to conclude an agreement for military cooperation.

The bloodshed that had begun in Addis Ababa and in Eritrea soon engulfed the entire country. Mengistu proclaimed Ethiopian socialism on December 20, 1974. The nationalization of all banks and insurance companies was announced on January 1, 1975. On February 3, 79 industrial and commercial companies were nationalized and the state

⁸Ibid., p. 53.

took a controlling interest in 29 others. On March 4, all rural land was nationalized and students were dispatched to the countryside to implement the new system.

In less than four months, the Derg had shattered most of the lines of authority that held Ethiopia together under the imperial regime. Internally rent with rivalry, it lacked the means of implementing its reforms systematically. The Ethiopian revolution seemed almost overnight to have developed into a Maoist frenzy to change everything.

Not surprisingly, the insurgents in Eritrea concluded that their hour had come. Ethiopian military efforts against them seemed almost automatically to work to their advantage. Conservative Arab states, alarmed at what was happening in Ethiopia, were eager to give more support to the Eritreans. Sudanese President Nimeiry had sympathized with Aman's efforts to reconcile Eritrea; shocked by Aman's violent death, Nimeiry permitted increased aid to insurgents through Sudanese territory.

Anti-Derg Insurgency, 1975-1976

Anti-Derg resistance movements grew rapidly in 1975. The Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) advocated replacement of the Derg with a liberal democratic government. It gained adherents in Gondar and Tigre but had few overt followers in the capital. The EDU was led by Ras Mengesha Seyum, long-time governor of Tigre under Haile Selassie and great-grandson of the last Tigrean emperor, Yohannes IV, and by two generals of the imperial army, Iyasu Mengesha, a Christian Eritrean, and Nega Tegegne, a native of Gondar. With Sudanese tolerance after Nimeiry turned sharply against Mengistu in 1976 (convinced that Mengistu and Qaddafi had been behind a near-successful coup against him), the EDU built up sizable military forces in Sudan.

The Tigre Popular Liberation Front (TPLF), a Marxist offshoot of the EPLF founded in 1975, was led by young activists who rejected the leadership of Ras Mengesha. The two movements together mobilized so much opposition to the Derg in Tigre that it was never able to gain effective control of the rural areas of the province.

The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP) came into the open in Addis Ababa on August 31, 1975, claiming that it had been founded in April 1972. The EPRP was Marxist but antimilitarist. It urged the Derg to step aside to make way for civilian leadership. It mobilized radical activists, including large numbers of students, into the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Army (EPRA), which was active

in both Tigre and Gondar.⁹ Apparently receiving some EPLF support, the EPRA cooperated with the Eritreans. The EPRP supported Eritrean self-determination in principle though it aimed to be essentially an all-Ethiopian national party.¹⁰ Rebellions led mostly by traditional leaders opposed to land reform broke out in several northern Amhara areas. The Raya and Azebu Oromo also became restive as did the Afars (Danakil). An Afar Liberation Front cooperating with Muslim Eritreans was formed under the leadership of the traditional Afar sultan and his family, who were underwritten by Saudi Arabia.

If Aman's policies had been followed and the Derg had been able to launch a genuine peace process in Eritrea, all of these other insurgencies would probably have developed much less rapidly, if indeed they had taken serious form at all. They were generated and fed not only by the Eritrean situation, however, but by an interlocking set of attitudes: resistance to overly rapid reforms, opposition to military leadership in principle, and desire for greater autonomy.

Effective central government administration lapsed in much of the northern part of the country. The insurgent movements filled the vacuum. Ethiopia appeared to be coming apart at all its seams. Prone to turn to military solutions for all problems, the Derg faced the difficulty of coping not only with steadily growing insurgency in Eritrea but with resistance movements throughout the entire region to the south of it.

Growing Eritrean Strength, 1976

Military operations in 1975 left more of Eritrea in insurgent hands than ever before. Still dependent on U.S. military aid and additional purchases from Ethiopia's own resources (the Derg had inherited a well-managed treasury with surpluses), the Derg could make only small increases in regular military manpower. To overcome this problem, it developed a plan for recruiting a huge peasant militia from the center

⁹The EPRP was rumored to have had Chinese support, but there is no evidence and little reason to believe that the Chinese were mixing into political ferment in Ethiopia at this time. It is much more likely that the EPRP grew out of a Soviet-backed student movement, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Movement (EPRM) active since the late 1960s both in Ethiopia and abroad, and that it initially represented a Soviet effort to play safe by having a civilian Marxist political group as a counterweight to the Derg, where the triumph of pro-Soviet, genuinely Marxist elements was still highly problematic.

¹⁰The EPRP and the EPRA sound similar to the earlier ENLF (see above, Sec. III, p. 33), which allegedly existed in Bale and Hararge after the defeat of the insurgency there in the early 1970s.

and south of the country and sending it to Eritrea in summer 1976. The scheme became more ambitious as it unfolded.

The Derg decided that the peasant militia would push out or annihilate the recalcitrant Eritreans and that militiamen would be offered the opportunity to resettle the region themselves. The genocidal character of the great peasant march alarmed many Ethiopian officials who had served the Derg loyally, and word leaked out to Western governments. Secretary of State Kissinger, who had just approved delivery to Ethiopia of a squadron of F-5Es originally promised to Haile Selassie in 1973, transmitted what amounted to an ultimatum to the Derg—call off the genocidal march or face Western sanctions.

The U.S. threat was not an idle one, for socialist Ethiopia still depended entirely on the West for military and economic aid. Plans for the march were scaled down and the F-5Es delivered,¹¹ but it was probably at this time that Mengistu decided that he would have to step up efforts to persuade the Soviets to provide military assistance in quantities substantially larger than the United States was ever likely to agree to.¹²

Meanwhile political conditions in Ethiopia had deteriorated. The capital and the south were also caught up in political ferment as several parties vied for influence and the Derg itself was drawn into the struggles. Derg experimentation in setting up a political movement led to conflict and confusion.

The Eritreans gained strength steadily during 1976, though rivalry among the insurgent factions—parallel with developments in Ethiopia as a whole—grew and new splinter groups appeared.¹³ The EPLF was

¹¹They enabled Ethiopian pilots to destroy the Soviet-furnished Somali air force in summer 1977 and thus blunt the initial thrust of the Somali offensive.

¹²See my *Russians and the Horn*, pp. 32–33.

¹³The Eritrean factional struggle took place along three principal axes: (a) among exiles and fighters in Eritrea; (b) among fighters in various regions of Eritrea along ethnic and religious lines; and (c) among exile leaders abroad. The complexities are such that it is extremely difficult even to try to summarize the situation, because there were also uncertainties at any given time regarding the true strength of subfactions and individual leaders' hold over their followers. The following summary from Erlich's *Struggle* is as accurate a description of key trends and developments as can be found. 1972–1974: The ELF-RC refuses to recognize the EPLF. Continuous war between the two claims over a thousand dead. Late 1974: Following the Ethiopian revolution, both organizations grow. The majority of the new recruits are Christian Tigreans. War between the two organizations ends, and there is even some military cooperation between them. Early 1975: Influence of young cadres in both organizations grows, leading to splits with exiles. Trend to the left and at the expense of Arabism. May 1975: Fighters establish new ELF-RC. September 1975: ELF-RC maintains "Unity Before Victory." Forms union with FM, later to discover that it no longer represents leadership abroad known as the Foreign Mission (FM). March 1976: Formal rupture of relations between EPLF and FM. Wild accusations on both sides. July 1976: ELF-RC recognizes FM as a third Eritrean nationalist organization. January 1977: EPLF congress. Formal adoption of

nevertheless gaining the upper hand, advocating "revolution before unity," emphasizing the principle of uncompromising struggle against "Ethiopian imperialism."

A similar development was taking place inside the Derg—but with quite different implications. Leftist rivals of Mengistu pushed through a plan for what was called the National Democratic Revolution, adopted by the Derg in April 1976. It envisioned a one-party people's republic with regional self-administration for ethnic groups.

While implementation of the Derg program as a whole was to be postponed until conditions were more propitious, the Eritrean problem was so urgent that the Derg announced a nine point program for Eritrea on May 16, 1976. It included "regional autonomy" for all nationalities in Eritrea—seven national districts were envisioned. The scheme could be interpreted as a plan to eliminate the Eritrean problem by eliminating Eritrea itself.

The Derg's position was contradictory. According to Erlich, while the Derg was waving the olive branch with one hand, the wing headed by Mengistu and Atnafu was preparing the peasant march—the military option.¹⁴ In any event, Marxist idealism in the Derg had little chance of meshing with Marxist idealism in the EPLF.

EPLF National Democratic Program, 1977

The EPLF's answer to the Derg's nine-point program was intensified military operations in Eritrea, increasing disinclination to compromise with other insurgent leaders and groups, and a "national democratic program," adopted by the first congress of the EPLF on January 31, 1977. Although this program gives generous lip service to humanitarian and democratic principles, it does not offer much assurance that the rule of law would prevail in an independent Eritrea

—
"revolution before unity" policy. Partial cooperation with ELF-RC expressed in establishment of joint front. FM rejected totally. *April 1977*: FM, having mobilized fighters, renamed Eritrean Liberation Front-Popular Liberation Forces (ELF-PLF). *January 1977-early 1978*: EPLF and ELF-RC succeed in gaining control of Eritrean towns. EPLF proves more efficient and stronger. *June 1977*: ELF-RC and EPLF establish a coordinating body, the National Democratic Front (NDF) to include non-Eritrean anti-Derg organizations, but not the ELF-PLF. Meanwhile, Saudi money and Sudanese aid channeled to the ELF-PLF. *July 1977*: The conquest of Keren by the EPLF shows that the NDF was a fiction from the start. The ELF-RC recognizes the ELF-PLF as entitled to membership in the NDF. Close military cooperation between them. *July-August 1977*: Internal clashes in ELF-RC over policy on EPLF and ELF-PLF deserters. Formation of new factions in the ELF-RC, internal instability in the EPLF. The ELF-RC accuses the EPLF of betraying Eritreanism and collaborating with Ethiopians and Soviets.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 101.

dominated by the EPLF. Many provisions of the program appear to cancel each other out, e.g.:¹⁵

1. Establish a People's Democratic State
 - Assure all Eritrean citizens equality before the law without distinction as to nationality, tribe, religion, sex, cultural level, occupation, position, wealth, faith.
 - Severely punish Eritrean lackeys of Ethiopian colonialism who have committed crimes against the nation and the people.

Other portions of the EPLF program combine broad goals with harsh Stalinist-style rhetoric, threats against opposition, and narrow dogmatism on economic and racial issues:

2. Build an Independent, Self-Reliant and Planned National Economy
 - Confiscate all land in the hands of the Ethiopian regime, the imperialists, zionists and Eritrean lackeys and put it in the service of the Eritrean masses.
 - Make big nationalized farms and extensive farms requiring modern techniques [into] state farms and use their produce for the benefit of the masses.
 - Promote an association that will organize, politicize and arm the peasants with a clear revolutionary outlook so they can fully participate in the anticolonial and anti-feudal struggle, defend the gains of the revolution, free themselves from oppression and economic exploitation, and manage their own affairs.
 - Nationalize all industries in the hands of the imperialists, zionists, Ethiopian colonialists and their Eritrean lackeys as well as resident aliens opposed to Eritrean independence.
3. Develop Culture, Education, Technology and Public Health
 - Obliterate the decadent culture and disgraceful social habits that Ethiopian colonialism, world imperialism and zionism have spread in order to subjugate and exploit the Eritrean people and destroy their identity.
4. Safeguard Social Rights
 - Abolish the system of labor laws and sham trade unions set up by Ethiopian colonialism and its imperialist masters to exploit and oppress Eritrean workers.
5. Ensure the Quality and Consolidate the Unity of Nationalities

¹⁵The provisions are cited verbatim from the text reproduced in Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe, and Bereket Habte Selassie (eds.), *Behind the War in Eritrea*, Spokesman, Nottingham, 1980, pp. 143-150.

- Forcefully oppose those who, in the pursuit of their own interests, create cliques on the basis of nationality, tribe, region, etc., and obstruct the unity of the revolution and the people.

Other articles of the program called for the following:

Severely punish the die-hard, criminal and atrocious henchmen and lackeys of Ethiopian colonialism.

Mercilessly punish aliens who, as lackeys and followers of Ethiopian colonialism, imperialism and zionism, spy on or become obstacles to the Eritrean people.

Support all just and revolutionary movements, as our struggle is an integral part of the international revolutionary movement in general and the struggle of the African, Asian and Latin American peoples against colonialism, imperialism, zionism and racial discrimination in particular.

In comparison with the EPLF's language, the Derg's nine-point program of the previous May sounds statesmanlike. The nine-point program, however, obscured the savage intensity of the most ruthless elements in the Derg and their determination to subjugate Eritrea by force. The EPLF's use of uncompromising, threatening language reflected both the Marxist rigidity of its leadership and its lack of assurance of complete support by the insurgent rank and file. As events during the following year would demonstrate, the severity of the language of the EPLF national democratic program was directed not only against Ethiopian colonialists and imperialists but against Eritrean insurgent rivals.

Final Derg Failure to Pacify Eritrea

The deteriorating central government position in Eritrea was a major factor in the next internal Derg confrontation. Leftists in the Derg appear to have been urging cooperation with the EPRP to gain its support in working out a political compromise in Eritrea. Mengistu struck back on February 3, 1977. Victims included Gen. Teferi Banti, who had moderated his hard-line stance of two years before and now apparently favored negotiations with the EPLF. As a result of this bloodbath, Mengistu emerged into the open as Derg chairman, a position he has held ever since. Given what we now know of developments among the Eritrean insurgents, we have good reason to doubt that the EPRP and Derg members sympathetic to it would have found much to negotiate about with EPLF leaders.

In this endlessly grim drama, other opportunities for alliances were also thrown to the wind. The Red Sea Arab states had become alarmed by developments in Ethiopia in 1976. Sudan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia drew Syria and North Yemen into talks in early 1977 aimed at luring South Yemen from the Soviet camp and strengthening the non-Marxist Muslims in Eritrea. All Ethiopians were worried about this prospect, but it proved to be a hollow threat, for the young Marxists of the EPLF were unwilling to accept conservative Arab support and were less willing than ever to cooperate with moderates, such as ELF-RC leader Osman Salih Sabbe:

The Red Sea Arabs . . . wanted to see [Sabbe] lead a unified Eritrean movement, with a concomitant decline in the power of the Marxists and radical leftists. The general trend in the Eritrean movement . . . was . . . in exactly the opposite direction. . . . In early 1977 the Saudis suspended their financial support, renewal conditional on the unification of the two movements. . . . The increasingly leftist EPLF cited Marxist justification for putting revolution before unity, and its position prevailed. In early 1977, even as the Eritreans were defeating the Ethiopian army in the field, they were losing the war. Their old allies and supporters, Libya and PDRY [People's Democratic Republic of Yemen] (and even the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization]) were now supporting the Derg, and the Soviet Union and Cuba were about to build a new Ethiopian army.¹⁶

By June and July 1977, Eritrean insurgent operations had resulted in the capture of the strategically important towns of Keren and Decamere. Military success increased factional competition both within and between the various Eritrean organizations. Two hundred members of the ELF-RC were reported killed in factional fighting in July and the EPLF arrested hundreds of its members for acting counter to the provisions of the official program.

The fact that the Eritreans were able during the remainder of 1977 to expand the area under their control while internecine competition increased in all groupings steadily is ascribable primarily to the weakness of the Ethiopian army. By the end of the year the Derg retained a hold on no more than 5 percent of the province. The port of Massawa was under siege and the capital, Asmara, was thought likely to be assaulted momentarily. But the competing and mutually hostile insurgent organizations could not agree on a plan for consolidating victory:

On the threshold of victory . . . the young leaders had lost their chance to implement their goals. They had pushed aside older leaders in exile, but their radicalism had prevented them from benefiting from what was fundamentally a pro-Eritrean process in the

¹⁶ Erlich, *Struggle*, pp. 83-84.

region. . . . The neighboring Red Sea Arab states [now] conceived an independent, radical Eritrea as a great threat to their interests. Thus the stronger the EPLF became, the more isolated it became.¹

A belated and abortive effort to achieve Eritrean unity took place again in Khartoum in March 1978. It was too late. The opportunity to capitalize on the Derg's fight against Somalia had been lost. Later that year, with greatly increased forces armed with Soviet weaponry, the Derg was able to exploit insurgent disunity and demoralization and regain control of all major Eritrean cities and communication routes.

The failure of the Derg's efforts to subjugate Eritrea was the primary cause of the Ethiopian crisis of 1977. Other factors contributed as well, such as the speed of internal socialist-style reforms, which provoked strong reactions, and the ideologically oriented political infighting that intensified during 1976 and 1977. Internal Derg dissension exacerbated all problems. But these problems by themselves would not necessarily have tempted Somalia's pro-Soviet strong man, Mohammed Siad Barre, to attack directly if most of Ethiopia's armed forces had not become hopelessly bogged down in Eritrea.

The Derg's approach to the nationalities question, which has relevance to both the Ogaden and Eritrea, is discussed in the Appendix.

THE SOMALI WAR

Increased Soviet Arms for Somalia

By 1974 Siad's relations with the Soviets had matured to the point of signing a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance. Somalia's armed forces, based on a population no more than a tenth that of Ethiopia, were in manpower alone half as large. In aircraft, tanks, and several other types of equipment, Somalia had achieved quantitative equality with Ethiopia.

Ethiopia had never represented a military threat to Somalia. With the defeat of the Bale-Ogaden insurgency in the late 1960s, Haile Selassie had achieved a *modus vivendi* with Somalia's moderate premier, Mohammed Ibrahim Egal. Siad Barre's seizure of power in October 1969 made Ethiopians uncomfortable, but the imperial regime went to some lengths to avoid strain in relations and the next year sent one of its ablest diplomats to serve as ambassador in Mogadishu. This man, Ayalew Mandefro, was called back by the Derg to become minister of defense in 1975.

¹Ibid., p. 95.

Significantly, in reaction to the Ethiopian revolution, the Soviets sharply increased arms aid to Siad Barre's regime. During the four years from 1974 to 1977, Somalia received \$300 million in military aid, almost all of it from the USSR or Soviet-friendly countries. As I concluded in an earlier detailed study of arms flow into the Horn: "The Soviet Union showed no reluctance to provide arms in excessive quantities to the one country in the region which faced no demonstrable external or internal threat."¹⁸

Whether the Soviets, who steadily increased their military and security advisers in Somalia during the mid-1970s,¹⁹ advised the Somalis to consider operations against Ethiopia is not known; subsequent events made it clear that they did not discourage them. As Somali preparations continued, it is impossible that the Soviets could have remained unaware of them, for Soviet advisory presence in the Somali military and security services was too pervasive.

Activities of Somali Liberation Fronts

The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) had continued a shadowy existence since the late 1960s.²⁰ In 1976, the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF) announced its formation. It was purportedly an indigenous Ethiopian group representing Oromo desires for separation from Ethiopia and incorporation into a greater Somalia. Agents of these two fronts, which had only a tenuous existence on Ethiopian territory, appeared in the Ogaden and Bale in 1975 and 1976. Their activities soon aroused the concern of Derg officials. By this time, southern Ethiopia, though free of major insurgencies, had also been engulfed in political ferment as the various political movements, some with the encouragement of Derg members, tried to build a following in the provinces.

¹⁸Paul B. Henze, "Arming the Horn 1960-1980--Military Expenditures, Arms Imports and Military Aid in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan, With Statistics on Economic Growth and Governmental Expenditures," published in draft as International Security Studies Working Paper No. 43, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1982, and in final form in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, East Lansing, Mich., 1984, pp. 637-656.

¹⁹In absolute terms the Soviets had far more personnel in Somalia, approximately 4000 at their height, than they have ever had in Ethiopia; on a per capita basis the disparity is vastly greater.

²⁰According to some reports it was newly "founded" in 1975. See I. M. Lewis, "The Western Somali Liberation Front and the Legacy of Sheikh Hussein of Bale," in Joseph Tubiana (ed.), *Modern Ethiopia from the Accession of Menelik II to the Present*, Balkema, Rotterdam, 1980, pp. 409-415.

The two Somali-sponsored fronts began to infiltrate arms and set up cadres in the entire southeastern region during the winter of 1973-1977. Supplies were stockpiled in Somalia to support a major offensive. Elaborate propaganda support plans were also developed to give both fronts the appearance of being genuine Ethiopian-based grass-roots movements.

As political ferment increased in Ethiopia and respect for the Derg—more importantly perhaps confidence that it could actually maintain its hold on power—decreased in outlying regions, the Oromo population in the highland areas became ready to hedge bets on the future by cooperating with the Somali-supported infiltrators when that was the easiest course to follow. Ethiopian Somalis in the Ogaden and in the Harar-Diredawa area—though the latter were not enthusiastically pro-Siad—began to identify with what appeared to be the wave of the future—a possibly successful effort at expansion by the Mogadishu regime.

Strong pro-Mogadishu feelings among Oromo were rare, but grievances of many kinds had by this time accumulated against the Derg.²¹ Large landowners and regional leaders favored by the imperial administration had been alienated by the loss of their property. Some of these saw collaboration with Somalia as a way of gaining redress or at least revenge. Though the Mogadishu regime was in both theory and practice at least as socialist as the Derg, the two fronts stressed nationalism and exploitation of grievances without encumbering themselves with detailed economic and social programs for the future.

Somali Invasion of Ethiopia, 1977

Siad Barre's original plan may have been to build up insurgency gradually through these two fronts. As the situation in Ethiopia degenerated and the Derg became even more deeply ensnared in Eritrea, and as worldwide concern about killings and oppression in Ethiopia mounted, Siad sensed an opportunity to advance quickly and decisively against Ethiopia.

By the time the Soviets brought Fidel Castro into the situation in March 1977, they must have had a very good idea of Siad's plans.²² Castro's efforts to bring all the contending elements in the Horn and South Arabian region together into a federation in which the People's

²¹ In its program circulating in 1985, the Oromo Liberation Front claims to have formulated its positions in "Finfine, Oromia [i.e. Addis Ababa], October 1974 and amended in June 1976."

²² Even if they had not encouraged him or discussed his plans with him—a possibility that neither side has ever confirmed or denied.

Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), Djibouti, Eritrea, and the Ogaden would have separate status along with Ethiopia and Somalia, appealed to no one. Castro returned home with the Great Star of Somalia, which Siad had awarded him, and the complaint that all the leaders in the Horn put nationalism above socialism.

In June, Somali guerrillas cut the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railroad, both actually and symbolically one of Ethiopia's lifelines. In July, full-scale Somali invasion began with regular Somali troops thinly disguised as WSLF fighters in the vanguard. Lightly held Ethiopian positions in the Ogaden fell in quick succession.

On the third anniversary of the revolution, September 12, 1977, Jijiga, key to the route up onto the plateau to Harar, fell. With it the Ethiopians lost a new American-supplied radar station that had only recently gone into operation. The American-supplied F-5Es had already inflicted heavy damage on the Somali air force, as well as on ground units, however, and the Somali offensive was held short of Harar.

In the south, the Somalis advanced to the edge of the plateau, out of Somali-populated territories into Oromo regions of Bale. Here the SALF was expected to rally the Oromo to support Mogadishu's offensive. It lacked credibility. The Oromo may have wavered briefly in some areas, but basically they rallied to Ethiopia.

Mengistu, who time and again in the previous three years had proven himself more fast-footed than his opponents and more adroit in knowing when to bend ideologically, was using patriotic slogans and reminders from history to rally the population to defend Mother Ethiopia. Revolutionary rhetoric was dampened. Pressure for compliance with reforms was eased.

Siad Barre had overextended himself. He had also overestimated his ability to dupe potential Western backers. American intelligence was too good to permit credence to be given to Siad's claim that no regular Somali forces were fighting in Ethiopia. The United States adopted a policy of no military assistance to either side in the conflict.

Even though Jijiga fell, opening the way for Somali forces to advance on Harar and Dire Dawa, which they besieged at the end of the year, it was already clear in September that neither Mengistu nor Ethiopia had been dealt a death blow.²³ Several divisions of new militia recruits were swelling the Ethiopian forces, while Somalia's manpower

²³ This was quite evident to me when I visited Ethiopia as a National Security Council (NSC) staff member during mid-September, and I so reported to Zbigniew Brzezinski and President Carter. Because the area is devoid of readily exploitable resources, the temporary loss of the Ogaden did not represent a loss of strength for Ethiopia or a gain for Somalia.

was stretched as far as it could reach. Ethiopian nationalism was residually stronger than Siad and many others assumed. Siad's assault may well have saved Mengistu and the Derg itself, for while reducing revolutionary pressure on the population at large, Mengistu struck out boldly against political opponents, purging Marxist intellectuals such as Haile Fida and mounting the Red Terror against the EPRP.

Soviet Military Intervention to Save Ethiopia

This is not the place to repeat what is already well known about solidification of the Soviet embrace of the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia (PMGSE).²⁴ The Soviets had committed themselves to a military relationship with Ethiopia, as far as we can tell, in December 1976, in the wake of the U.S. presidential election that year. The commitment required severance of Ethiopia's military relationship with the United States, for which Mengistu found an opportunity next spring.

Whatever master plan the Soviets may have had at the time could hardly have envisioned the unraveling of the entire Horn situation that occurred during summer and fall 1977. Trying to retain a position in Somalia to the last, they accepted Siad's expulsion²⁵ after they began their massive airlift and sealift of arms and Cuban troops in November.

Soviet and Cuban generals took almost complete charge of operations. By the end of January 1978, the Somalis were everywhere on the run. Cubans and Ethiopians relieved the siege of Harar and Dire Dawa on February 12 and declared the eastern highlands wholly liberated on March 5. On March 9, Siad Barre announced the withdrawal of all Somali regular forces from Ethiopian territory²⁶ but pledged moral support to the fight that the two liberation fronts—the WSLF and the SALF—claimed they would continue. All the main roads and population centers of the Ogaden were quickly reoccupied by Ethiopian forces with close Cuban support.

A large part of the Ethiopian Somali population fled to Somalia with the retreating Somali army. Siad's pledge to the guerrilla fronts, however, represented a firm intention to continue the struggle in the way it had originally been planned. WSLF guerrilla operations continued for the next two years, at times reaching a high level of intensity. They

²⁴See my *Russians and the Horn*, pp. 34-46; and "Getting a Grip on the Horn," pp. 172-173.

²⁵But not severance of diplomatic relations, which continue to this day.

²⁶Up to then, he had steadfastly maintained that there were no regular Somali forces fighting in Ethiopia.

were hampered by lack of popular base for the guerrillas to depend upon, and disguised Somali *regulars* were again infiltrated, but not in large numbers. Continued SALF operations proved more illusory and were confined primarily to hit-and-run episodes. The majority of the Oromo population remained loyal to Ethiopia.

A more farsighted and creative leader than Mengistu might have capitalized on the victory over Somali aggression that Soviet and Cuban aid had made possible so quickly by permanently moderating policies that had invited the assault in the first place. This did not happen. The Soviets, eager to lock Ethiopia into socialism and turn it into a Soviet-style "people's democracy," pressed Mengistu to set up a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party.

Mengistu had his own reasons for going slow but demonstrated his Marxist-Leninist zeal by aping Soviet practice in many other respects. He proceeded with the reconstruction of the economy and society along Soviet lines. Avoiding direct participation in ground operations in Eritrea, Cubans and Soviets provided valuable training and staff guidance for the greatly expanded Ethiopian ground forces.

During the height of the Somali invasion, EDU forces had crossed from Sudan and captured a sizable sector of Gondar province in the northwest, including Humera, center of a rich agricultural region. They proved unable to defend their gains against Ethiopian counterattack. EPRP groups took refuge in several inaccessible regions in Gondar, Wollo, and Tigre in the winter of 1977-1978. When Ethiopian forces regained control of most of Eritrea, other northern resistance groups also reduced the scope of their operations.

By the end of 1978, regional rebellions and dissident movements had fallen back to the level of the early postrevolutionary period. Gradually, however, it became apparent that Derg policies offered little hope of escape from the rigidities of Soviet-style socialism and pressures for agricultural arrangements that would facilitate governmental control over all production with little profit to farmers. Economic stagnation affected the north much more quickly than it did the south. Under such conditions, even moderately adverse weather conditions led to harvest failures, and local famines were developing by 1979. In such ground, fertile for little else, dissidence and rebellion, never dead, burst forth anew.

V. IRAN AND ETHIOPIA—PARALLEL PATHS?

MONARCHIES TOPPLED BY REVOLUTION

Two old empires with roots deep in the past fell unexpectedly within less than half a decade of each other. Both had been oriented toward the West and had had a special relationship with the United States. Both had been headed by monarchs who had sought to modernize but had come to be regarded by their younger generations as anachronisms and the regimes they headed as oppressive.

Expectations of a more liberal political system, widespread among intellectual opponents of the imperial regimes, were quickly dashed when successor regimes in both countries proved far less adept than the leaders they replaced had been at controlling disparate forces competing for power and influence. Both turned quickly to oppression—which, in turn, provoked rebellion. In terms of governmental theory and structure, each tried to institutionalize a far more authoritarian system than the one it replaced. Serious questions have arisen in respect both to Ethiopia and Iran: Can the old empires be held together at all? Are the countries themselves perhaps anachronisms?

Ethiopia and Iran have many basic similarities. Both are relatively isolated in their regions. Both have a sense of being unique and superior to most of the surrounding peoples, especially Arabs in the case of Iran and Black Africans in the case of Ethiopia. Both went through long periods of decline during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but in the end a consciousness of history and special religious traditions proved strong enough to enable them to rejuvenate. In both, however, nationalism is a complex phenomenon and the dominant nationality is actually a minority in the population as a whole.¹

In both Ethiopia and Iran, the seemingly formidable imperial governmental structure shattered rapidly under challenge. The successors in Ethiopia were a military junta. Religious leaders were passive. In Iran, the military proved passive while clerics rapidly took control of the revolution and excluded all other participants and rivals. The result was, however, much the same, for in both countries insecure new leaders rushed to impose on the entire population a highly dogmatic

¹People of Turkic derivation may actually outnumber Persians in Iran, but their subgroup orientation is stronger than their sense of common Turkic identity. Each Turkic group displays somewhat different patterns of integration into Iranian society and political life, with the Azeris having the closest and deepest relationship. There are many parallels with the Oromo of Ethiopia.

political, social, and economic philosophy. In pressing changes, these regimes soon found themselves compelled to resort to oppression far more direct and onerous for most of the population than wrongs allegedly suffered under the imperial predecessors.

Coercion and oppression in both countries provoked violence in the capital and rebellion in the periphery. The Ethiopian revolutionary regime rushed impatiently to settle the chronically intractable Eritrean rebellion by force and in doing so exacerbated its predicament drastically. The Iranian revolutionary clerics were equally inept in dealing with resistance among Kurds, Azeris, Arabs, Baluches, and various tribal groups.

In both countries, military power was undermined by the rupture of traditional support relationships with the United States and purging of Western-oriented senior officers. In both cases, too, the revolutionary regimes lost sight of dangers beyond their borders. Traditional enemies, watching closely, could not resist exploiting what they saw as golden opportunities.

OPPORTUNISTIC INTERVENTION BY NEIGHBORS

To irredentist Siad Barre of Somalia, the temptation to deliver a death blow to a seemingly disintegrating Ethiopia and secure coveted territories inhabited mostly by Somalis proved irresistible. Saddam Hussein of Iraq found it equally impossible to pass up the opportunity to bring down a detestable Iranian clerical regime, liberate the Arabs of Khuzistan, and reassert Iraq's rights in the Gulf. Both the Somalis and Iraqis had been armed well beyond their own defense requirements by the Soviets.

Both miscalculated. The old empires proved surprisingly resilient. Under assault from traditional enemies, revolutionary leaders rallied their people to the defense of the national territory. Although large numbers of Somalis of the Ogaden shifted allegiance to Mogadishu and many fled into Somalia on defeat, the Arabs of Khuzistan did not defect en masse to Iraq. Nor did the Iraqi Shiites turn into a fifth column operating against Baghdad. In both Ethiopia and Iran, revolutionary regimes, whatever their shortcomings, skillfully exploited the residual patriotism of the people. Revolutionary rhetoric was selectively dampened, the implementation of "reforms" was slowed, and some concessions were made to regional grievances.

Ethiopia required foreign help to defeat the Somalis, who were clearly the aggressors. Although the Somalis attracted sympathy from anti-Soviet Western powers, the fact of their aggression (especially in

view of their violation of the almost universally accepted African principle of recognition of colonial-era borders) made it impossible for any Western power to provide the military support needed to retain Ethiopian territory. They overextended themselves and failed to bring down the Mengistu regime. In effect, although the Mengistu regime was faltering badly, Ethiopian popular reaction against the Somali aggression strengthened it. Short of U.S. intervention—quite out of the question for any American administration—the Somalis were doomed to eventual defeat, even without a massive Soviet-Cuban support operation to bolster the Ethiopians.

The Iraqis even more clearly instigated the aggression against Iran,² and they, too, aimed at toppling the revolutionary leader, in this case, Khomeini. The attack, however, gave Khomeini the opportunity to transform himself from a supranational Muslim fanatic into a national leader. Iran, however, was unable to gain help from a single major foreign source. It was more successful than Ethiopia was in 1977–1978, however, in quickly restoring the morale and fighting capacity of its armed forces.

Iraq has not yet been defeated as decisively as Somalia was as a consequence of Soviet-Cuban intervention in support of Mengistu. But Saddam Hussein clearly cannot win—barring the collapse of both the revolutionary leadership and the rejuvenated Iranian armed forces, both unlikely but the latter much more so than the former. In effect, he must bargain for peace to avoid territorial losses and reparations and, in the final analysis, simply to preserve his hold on power in Iraq. Like Siad Barre in Somalia, however, he has the temporary advantage of having got his country into such an uncomfortable predicament that rivals for power are not eager to take on his problems.

U.S. RELUCTANCE TO BECOME INVOLVED

In both situations, the United States with considerable difficulty has gradually improved relations with regimes that were virulently anti-American when they enjoyed strong Soviet support. The Carter administration was eager in principle to embrace Siad Barre so as to gain the use of Somali military facilities; in practice, however, it found the risks too high. Siad organized major guerrilla operations inside Ethiopia during 1978 and 1979, relying on a modest level of military assistance from conservative Arab sources, primarily Egypt.

²They did not even pretend, as the Somalis did, that they were merely supporting grass-roots "liberation fronts."

Clearly, the provision of U.S. military aid that Siad could have used offensively would have emboldened him to resume the assault on Ethiopia—with the likely result that Ethiopia, strengthened with large quantities of Soviet arms, would have retaliated. No U.S. administration could gamble on becoming entangled in such an imbroglio. The military arrangements that it finally worked out with Somalia in 1980, therefore, had to be both limited and hedged. The Reagan administration found no rationale for altering the basic approach of the Carter administration to Somalia.

The U.S. task of improving relations with Iraq has been even more complicated. The Iraqis were less eager than the Somalis to have unconditional U.S. backing, and diplomatic relations had been broken in 1967.³ Their disengagement from the Soviet embrace was much less complete than that of the Somalis.⁴ Emotional pressures for a strong U.S. tilt toward Iraq have developed over and over again, but sober examination of the implications of an all-out anti-Iranian policy has invariably led to the realization that it would not serve basic American interests.⁵ As a result, U.S.-Iraqi diplomatic relations were restored at the end of 1984, after prolonged and delicate negotiations neither party could (or did) interpret as decisively taking sides in the Iran-Iraq war.

The Israeli dimension of both the Ethiopian and Iranian situations is also revealing. Both countries, under their imperial regimes, had close ties to Israel, as well as to each other. Traditional mutual hostility toward the Arabs formed a common bond. Though the two revolutionary regimes are officially hostile to Israel, both have accepted limited Israeli military assistance. The relationship of the Ethiopian revolutionary regime with Israel has been the more extensive. It demonstrates how deep basic geopolitical and historical orientations of this kind are and how they reassert themselves despite ideological intensity and revolutionary rhetoric.

³U.S.-Somali diplomatic relations were strained after Siad Barre took power in 1969 but never broken.

⁴Somalia has never broken diplomatic relations with Moscow, which retains a diplomatic presence in Mogadishu.

⁵Many arguments militate against such a stance, including the fact that it would open the way for the Soviets to present themselves as protectors of Iran's interests, deprive the United States of the opportunity to exercise subtle leverage on Iranian developments in the post-Khomeini era, and freeze U.S.-Iranian relations into the same kind of deadlock into which the United States fell with communist China after 1949. I have discussed these issues at greater length in a recent Foreign Area Research study, *Central Asia in the 1980s: Strategic Dynamics in the Decade Ahead*, FAR, Inc., Kansasville, Wis., July 1984, pp. 55-86.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

What lessons do we draw from comparison of the Ethiopian and Iranian revolutionary experiences? First and foremost, we should not underestimate the viability of old established states. Because their cultural roots are deep, their politics complex, and their historical experience extensive, they can undergo severe stress and temporary disintegration and still rally. Ethnic and regional particularism in such states is not necessarily a source of weakness in times of troubles. Peoples who have lived together in multiethnic, regionally complex political systems develop habits of compromise and adjustment that may be obscured by revolutionary commotion.

When overwhelming pressures force revolutionaries to moderate their zeal, or when revolutionary momentum wanes, earlier patterns reassert themselves and diversity becomes a source of strength. The process does not necessarily proceed smoothly, and it is too early in both Ethiopia and Iran to forecast how it will unfold over the next few years. Certainly, the reconstruction of these societies and the reestablishment of these two old states as responsible constructive members of the international political system will require a reduction in revolutionary arrogance and ideological zealotry. These changes will, in turn, improve chances for compromises in relations with both internal and external rivals and enemies.

For powers that want to encourage constructive political evolution in Ethiopia and Iran another conclusion is clear: The encouragement of regional dissidence and ethnic separatism *as an end in itself* will not achieve the objective. The more such movements can exploit short-term outside support, the less inclined they are likely to be to exert realistic pressures inside their own political system for change. Their activities can, in fact, impede change and temporarily strengthen the position of the regimes they oppose.

To say this is not to dismiss the often legitimate desires of ethnic minorities and the inhabitants of cohesive regions for some degree of autonomy from central governments inclined to ignore ethnic and regional interests. The desires of such groups for a greater say in the management of the resources of their regions and for cultural self-assertion deserve respect. Less dogmatic and less authoritarian central governments are likely to recognize these aspirations—or at least to recognize the practical advantages of working out compromises that, in the end, benefit everyone. A democratic, pluralist system provides the basis for adjustment of such problems without undermining the existence of the state itself.

A highly efficient totalitarian state, one may argue, can equally effectively suppress ethnic and regional dissent: Consider the example of the USSR. Such a high degree of repressive capability clearly exceeds the capacity of the Derg in Ethiopia at any point in the foreseeable future; the same would seem to apply (though in a quite different fashion) to Khomeini in Iran.

The distinction between advocating political separatism and giving greater attention to regional and ethnic diversity is reasonably clear-cut from a policy viewpoint and should confront the United States with no great difficulty. It is, in effect, the basic policy that derives naturally from American advocacy of democratic principles of government, private enterprise and the free market economy, and pluralism as a basis for social organization.

VI. REBELLION AND DISSIDENCE ELEVEN YEARS AFTER THE REVOLUTION

As of 1985, despite the ferment that famine has generated in Ethiopia and the embarrassment that worldwide publicity about conditions in the country has caused the regime, the dissident and separatist movements and Mengistu's pro-Soviet regime appear to be at a stand-off. The regime has little chance of a decisive victory over any of the dissident movements; at the same time, the likelihood that any of these movements could gain a decisive victory over the regime is also minimal. Massive Western famine relief has probably, for the short term at least, strengthened the regime. The details vary substantially from one group and area to another.

SOMALI-ORIENTED MOVEMENTS

The Somali-oriented movements are weak and have little active following in Ethiopia. Somali dissidents—i.e., opponents of Siad Barre who are supported in various degrees by Ethiopia—may have become a greater potential threat to Mogadishu than the remnants of the Western Somali Liberation Front and the Somali Abo Liberation Front are to Addis Ababa. Even if friendly sources were to greatly increase their support, including significant arms, to Somalia, that country probably could not mount another 1977-type offensive against Ethiopia, nor could it probably even find the manpower to sustain the kind of guerrilla warfare that it continued through 1978-1979.

Any new Somali-backed action against Ethiopia would cause most Ethiopians to rally around whatever regime might be in power in Addis Ababa to oppose Somali territorial ambitions. Additionally, any Ethiopian regime would continue to have the advantage of almost unanimous international backing for the principle of territorial integrity. Somalia obtained no serious support for altering its borders by force in 1977-1978; it has no prospects now. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) will remain opposed to all boundary changes except by mutual agreement.

The Cubans who remain in Ethiopia reinforce the PMGSE's military dispositions in the Diredawa-Harar-Jijiga area, but they are too

few in number¹ to constitute a major addition to Ethiopian military manpower guarding this strategic sector. There is little evidence of pro-Siad sympathy or direct Mogadishu influence in this region. The Somalis of the region are predominantly Issas on both sides of the border, as well as in Djibouti. They have traditionally seen their interests as quite distinct from those of southern Somalis.

By recognizing its inability to interfere with the massive smuggling across all the borders in this area (which makes northern Hararge, northern Somalia, and the Republic of Djibouti an informal "free trade area"), the PMGSE buys the toleration of the local population.² Nor has it pressed collective agriculture here. The growing of the narcotic leaf, *chat* (also called *qat*), and its legal export by air to Djibouti add to the relative prosperity of the rural population. All the indigenous peoples of the region are Muslim. Sufi orders are strong among them. The regime has permitted local Sufi sheikhs to retain status and influence.³

OTHER SOUTHERN INSURGENCIES

Other southern insurgencies do not seriously threaten the regime. The Sidamo Liberation Front seems to be largely illusory. The claims of the Oromo Liberation Front of widespread organization and effectiveness inside Ethiopia cannot be substantiated by firm evidence. *Oromia* as a territorial entity has no meaning inside Ethiopia. It is an exile construct. This is not to say that there is no evidence of dissatisfaction with the regime among Oromo, but to underscore the fact that such dissatisfaction is both territorially and politically diffuse and unlikely to coalesce into a coherent *ethnic resistance movement*.

Inside Ethiopia (in contrast to claims of exiles) Mengistu's regime is still perceived as friendly to the Oromo. The Derg and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE)⁴ have more members of Oromo than northern Amhara origin. The oversimplified allegation, repeated with

¹According to current best estimates, they number no more than 5000, most of whom are not combat-ready but are assigned to training and logistics tasks.

²Somalis are a minority throughout this region, where the dominant settled group is Kottu Oromo. The city of Harar has its own distinctive Semitic language and population, generally called Adari, whose traditions extend back to the Middle Ages. Though surrounded by Somali forces during winter 1977-1978, Harar held firm and its population did not accept Siad Barre's claim that they constituted part of the Somali irredenta. During the preceding period, the EPRP had been influential among younger Hararis, many of whom fled abroad during the Red Terror.

³These observations are based on a visit to Diredawa and Harar in December 1984.

⁴Officially proclaimed on September 12, 1984.

increasing frequency by some Ethiopian exile organizations, that the PMGSE is Amhara-dominated, just as Haile Selassie's regime allegedly was, cannot be sustained by analysis of personnel in key positions and is seldom heard inside Ethiopia.

Southern and southwestern Ethiopia, the last area to be brought under (or restored to, depending on which historical interpretation is emphasized) Ethiopian control at the end of the nineteenth century, has been less disturbed by active resistance since the revolution of 1974 than any other section of the country. Nevertheless, Mengistu cannot rely unequivocally on the support of the people of the area.

Grievances are mounting in the south and southwest. Though the region has not been seriously affected by famine and though agricultural productivity in many parts of it remains relatively high, there is growing dissatisfaction with regime land and procurement policies. Resistance to them takes the form of passive resistance to "socialism," i.e., avoidance of government economic controls, resort to semilegal or illegal channels for selling agricultural produce, especially coffee, the country's main foreign exchange earner.

The regime maintains fewer troops in the south and southwest than in any other part of the country. There is no security threat from across the Kenya and Sudan borders. A growing concentration in the Gambela region of refugees from southern Sudan does not constitute a security problem: the regime is offering them support and facilitating the flow of aid to southern Sudanese insurgents to counteract the support that Sudan permits to flow to the Eritreans, Tigreans, and other dissidents operating in northern Ethiopia. The interests of the southern Sudanese refugees coincide with those of Ethiopia. The Sudanese government lacks the military strength to intervene decisively in this region.

THE WOLLEGA OROMO

The Wollega Oromo, especially those belonging to the influential Mekane Yesus church, continue to represent a source of serious dis-

These judgments were made before the overthrow of the Nimeiry government in Khartoum, but they remain valid for the subsequent period. Neither Ethiopia nor Sudan has the capability of inflicting decisive military damage on the other - nor, in the final analysis, the incentive. There is no contested territory along the entire 1400-mile Ethiopian Sudanese border. Political tension between Ethiopia and the Sudan has always been a function of each country's international ties - and, tragically, though these have changed in both cases, the tensions have remained because of regional insurgencies neither the central government in Khartoum nor that in Addis Ababa has been able to settle: the southern Sudan and Eritrea. In terms of the pure *national interests* of both countries, Ethiopia and Sudan should be able to compose their differences to mutual advantage. It is in the interest of the United States but not the USSR that this occur.

sidence. The resettlement of large numbers of Tigrean famine victims in this region could generate further potential for rebelliousness: the resettled Tigreans and the local Oromo might find mutual advantage in uniting to undermine Derg efforts aimed at exploiting the resettlement process to establish agricultural collectives.

The shortage of information on the workings of the resettlement program does not permit a judgment as to the likelihood of the local Oromo and resettled Tigreans coming together to oppose Derg policies. Antagonism between the two groups would seem at least as likely as cooperation. There are reports of the escape of sizable numbers of resettled Tigreans across the border into Sudan, where they join their countrymen in refugee camps further north. Some may have returned to their original regions via this route.

REBELLION IN ERITREA

Eritrea still constitutes the most serious political and insurgency problem for any Ethiopian regime. The brutal ten-year revolutionary junta effort to subjugate Eritrea by arms has no chance of succeeding on its own terms. Eritrea is not, however (and probably never has been) a zero-sum game. The stalemating of PMGSE offensives does not translate automatically into insurgent gains. The Eritrean insurgency has less chance of succeeding in establishing the province as an independent entity than ever.

Eritrean Dependence on Outside Support

Eritrean independence has always been conditional on two prerequisites: (1) sustained control of the province, including the capital, Asmara, by a *united* insurgent movement and (2) *broad* international support and recognition. The first precondition was closer to achievement in early 1978 than it has been before or since, but Eritrean factions intensified fighting among themselves to the point where they could take no coordinated action to capitalize on the favorable circumstances they had created.

Though the Marxist EPLF has improved its position vis-a-vis its rivals since 1978, it still does not command enough positive support to be able to disregard rival insurgent movements or other ideological and religious currents among the population. Its Marxism is increasingly a handicap in efforts to secure international recognition and support. This ideology seriously limits the support that the EPLF can obtain from Arabs, among whom Marxist sympathies are everywhere on the

wane except perhaps in the PDRY. The PDRY is one of Mengistu's closest allies. It has almost no resources of its own to support activities abroad. It can only channel assistance supplied by the USSR or other radical Arab states.

Iraq and Syria may still be furnishing the EPLF with modest support. This may even be sanctioned by the Soviets as a form of casualty insurance. *Large-scale Soviet-approved help for Eritrean or Tigrean insurgency would be likely again only if an anti-Soviet regime were to gain power in Addis Ababa.*

An independent Eritrea could never secure broad recognition in Africa. International recognition could come from only a few Arab states. At present, however, no major Red Sea Arab state looks with anything but apprehension on the possibility of an independent Marxist Eritrea.

The more Arab states concentrate on internal threats to their own stability and on their domestic economic problems, the less enthusiasm they have for an independent Eritrea of any political coloration—Marxist or conservative—for they all fear the destabilizing effect of such a state on the region. This is equally true of Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Egypt, as well as of more distant states, such as Jordan and the Gulf sheikhdoms. Modest support for the Eritreans is still a convenient way for some of these states to demonstrate opposition to Mengistu's regime and gain anticommunist credentials, but the prospects for increased support during the next two or three years are small.

The EPLF and the other Eritrean groups will do well, in fact, to maintain their present level of outside support. Increasingly, the ability of the Eritrean insurgents to fight and to maintain control over the territory they administer depends on obtaining arms and supplies from Mengistu's armed forces.

Ethiopian troops in Eritrea have generally not fought well. Desertions have been common, and morale has been low. They have lost substantial amounts of major equipment to the insurgents during military operations. Moreover, when there is little fighting, soldiers and officers are tempted to engage in various kinds of illicit economic activity, including the sale of weapons and ammunition. This has given the insurgents a convenient internal source of resupply.

During early 1985, the EPLF managed to capture and hold Tesseney, a key western Eritrean center on the main route into Sudan. In early July, it succeeded in gaining Barentu, directly to the east and much deeper inside the country. It proved unable to hold Barentu against Ethiopian counterattack. Periodic gains and losses of this sort are likely to continue indefinitely. This part of Eritrea is populated

largely by Kunama, a tribal group that has remained strongly pro-Addis Ababa. The Kunama facilitated the Derg offensive in Eritrea in 1978.

Prospects for mounting another Eritrea-wide offensive aimed at dealing a decisive blow to the rebels are less favorable than at any time during the past six years. Mengistu could not be confident that his forces would maintain momentum long enough to inflict serious damage on the insurgents. More seriously, he could not feel sure that hard-pressed units would remain loyal to the PMGSE.

Possibilities for Settlement

A syndrome similar to that which set in during Haile Selassie's final year is more conceivable now than at any time since the revolution: the development of sentiment in the armed forces favoring a negotiated settlement in Eritrea. For this to proceed, however, requires a readiness on the Eritrean side to consider concessions.

We have little reason to believe that any sizable segment of the Ethiopian military forces fighting in Eritrea actually sympathizes with Eritrean separatist objectives. Everything we know about prevailing Ethiopian officer attitudes leads to the conclusion that they are strongly nationalist, much more nationalist than Marxist. Neither Marxism nor separatism, therefore, can serve as common ground between the Eritrean insurgents and Ethiopian officers who may be tiring of the unwinnable war in Eritrea. Only a return to some kind of federal arrangement appears to offer such hope.

Until very recently, however, most Eritrean insurgent spokesmen abroad indicated a hardening of separatist attitudes. This tendency was encouraged by conservative Arab supporters who believe, in doing so, that they are bringing greater pressure on Mengistu's regime. The Eritreans appeared nevertheless to be caught in what, to date, has been a never-ending cycle of illusion, for the Arab motivations are all short-term and tactical. Behind them lies neither a solid desire for an independent Eritrea nor the capability to generate the resources and diplomatic support necessary to maintain it.⁶

A majority of the Eritrean population is without doubt disaffected from Mengistu's regime. The regime has been unable to enforce most

⁶ Eritrean leaders again met and declared a "united front" in Khartoum in February 1985. It may again have been primarily a tactic to secure continued Saudi funding. Afterward, EPLF leaders were said to be engaged in contentious debate over what role Osman Salih Sabbe, a non-Marxist Muslim exile for almost 30 years, would have in a united organization and, by implication, in an independent Eritrea.

of its reforms and socialist innovations in Eritrea, though some of the EPLF's Marxist prescriptions parallel those of the PMGSE.

What is claimed by the EPLF as total control of the Eritrean countryside appears often to constitute the absence of effective coercive PMGSE authority. Services that the government provides, the population wants, and the insurgents benefit from are not only tolerated but welcomed and used: highway maintenance; postal, telephone, and telegraph services; and trade.

A sharp line between areas of insurgent influence and those where the government exercises some authority is difficult to draw. The two interpenetrate and vary between day and night. If the government attempts to exercise authority only partially, it is not challenged. It has demonstrated an ability to maintain its hold on key urban centers, including Asmara, Massawa, and several subprovincial capitals.

Ethnic and religious rivalries and tensions persist in Eritrea. Compared with the deterioration that has occurred in Lebanon in recent years, however, with separate communities living in isolation and under siege, Eritrean day-to-day life appears much more fluid and Eritrean society much less polarized. In addition, Eritreans still live and work in all other parts of Ethiopia, especially in Addis Ababa. A good deal of private travel takes place in and out of the province.

Decreasing EPLF Intransigence?

A possible break in the intransigence of the EPLF appeared last spring. The May 1985 issue of *Adulis*, organ of the Central Bureau of Foreign Relations of the EPLF in France, featured on its cover the statement "For the EPLF the struggles for Eritrean independence and democracy in Ethiopia are inseparable." A six-page article dealing with relations with "democratic movements in Ethiopia" included the following statements:

The demand for the secession of Ethiopian nationalities has neither an historical nor an economic basis; nor is the extent of the prevailing national antagonism so acutely sharp as to justify it. . . . In the specific case of the question of nationalities in Ethiopia, historical, economic and other factors show that unity based on equality is the only correct solution. . . . Respect by each nationality for the right of the others, inasmuch as it demands respect for its own rights, would help forge the unity of the oppressed and hasten the day of liberation.

Such positions could be interpreted as implying readiness on the part of the EPLF to adjust its own intransigent position in respect to independence and to compromise on a formula that would amount to a

return to federation. The concluding paragraph of this declaration reinforces this impression:

The Eritrean Popular Liberation Front has come forward to give its forthright views on the basic questions and tasks of the Ethiopian revolution because it is convinced that the destiny of the Eritrean and Ethiopian peoples is closely linked. The Front believes that for the advance of the Eritrean revolution, cooperation with the struggle of the Ethiopian peoples comes second only to the capability of the Eritrean people and that, for the Ethiopian revolution, the most important external factor is the Eritrean people's struggle. It works carefully, patiently, and seriously to broaden and deepen its relations with democratic Ethiopian organizations and reinforce the solidarity of the two peoples. The EPLF puts the importance of the formation of a solid alliance between the two revolutions above any of its diplomatic activities. At the same time, it expects from Ethiopia's democratic movements a similar stand and an equal sense of responsibility.

Or is the EPLF merely rejecting separatism for all groups in Ethiopia but itself? Its statements can be read both ways. Allowing for the fact that the apparent unity of the EPLF actually camouflages many diverse strains—reflecting the various nationalities, religions, and geographical realities of Eritrea—it is perhaps impossible for the specifics of the EPLF position to be worked out except in the context of serious negotiations with other Ethiopian groups.

At the same time the above statement was being publicized, the EPLF announced an amnesty forgiving all Eritreans "who have gone over to the enemy side for the wrongs they have committed. . . ."⁷ This is an additional sign of flexibility.

A sizable group of anti-Derg, pro-Western Ethiopian exiles who do not support any of the separatist movements is hopeful that the EPLF declaration represents a serious break in what has for so long been a frozen situation. Only the passage of time can provide a test. The response to the amnesty is unknown.

Eritreans living in Eritrea, still the majority of the region's population, and perhaps even those living in Sudan would probably not present an obstacle to a settlement by political negotiation that would leave Eritrea part of an Ethiopian state. Eritreans who have not fled must compromise every day to live and sustain themselves. They would welcome a reduction in the intensity of conflict. They would respond positively to opportunities to help themselves economically. Famine relief operations in Eritrea of foreign aid groups who are not strongly partisan but determined to reach the maximum number of

⁷Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *USSR Report. Political and Sociological Affairs*, JPRS-SSA-85-038, May 10, 1985.

people in need of food and medical assistance can help to create an atmosphere where political compromise, at least on a temporary basis, becomes an end in itself.

REBELLION IN TIGRE

For the following reasons, the rebellion in Tigre represents a more immediate problem for Mengistu's regime than that in Eritrea, although the two are closely related:

1. The Tigre Popular Liberation Front (TPLF) *appears* more united and less intransigent than the Eritrean movement and can more credibly claim to speak for a majority of the population of Tigre, which is ethnically homogeneous and predominantly Christian with only a small Muslim minority.
2. All important communications lines into Eritrea pass through Tigre. If roads through Tigre are interdicted, the Ethiopian military must resort to air supplies to support its positions in Eritrea.
3. Tigre has been most severely affected by famine and the population movements resulting from it, and it has been the focal point of international relief efforts.

The TPLF disavows separatism except as last resort. It calls for a united front among opponents of the PMGSE both inside and outside the country and advocates a democratic form of state organization with regional and/or ethnic autonomy.⁸

In reality, the on-the-ground situation in Tigre appears to have a great many similarities with that in Eritrea. Government and insurgents interpenetrate. The PMGSE has been able to maintain control of main highways and of the provincial capital, Makelle, as well as most other major towns. Governmental authority is weak to nonexistent in most of the countryside.

The most important and puzzling question about the TPLF's relationship to the Tigrean population is the most difficult to answer: How does the movement's relatively doctrinaire Marxism square with the fact that Tigreans have been known to be among Ethiopia's most tradition-loyal peoples, strong in their adherence to religion, whether

⁸Its somewhat equivocal official position in respect to Eritrea is necessitated in part by the fact that the TPLF essentially grew out of the EPLF and still depends on it for material help. Some TPLF pronouncements speak only of Ethiopia, others refer to Eritrea as if it were a separate country.

Christianity or Islam.⁹ Tigreans are known throughout Ethiopia as sharp businessmen and traders.

The young men who lead the TPLF claim to have effected a social revolution in Tigre and reoriented the population to new principles of cooperation and egalitarianism. If this is actually the case, they would seem to have changed some of the most basic principles of Tigrean life. Yet, we have little reason to regard their claims as much more than rhetoric. If family and group relationships have not changed basically, the TPLF may have put a Marxist veneer over preexisting habits.

The TPLF evokes the Weyane rebellion of 1943 as a symbol for Tigrean solidarity, but seems to misrepresent it as a social revolution. What the memory of Weyane means to Tigreans—except opposition to Shoa—is difficult to determine. Is the TPLF's Marxism simply a means of challenging the PMGSE's claims to be a Marxist government? Is it a device for facilitating political alliances with other groups who also claim to be Marxist, such as the EPLF, the EPRP, and perhaps the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (EPDM)? Do TPLF leaders hope some day to regain Soviet support?

Tigreans have for centuries migrated to other parts of Ethiopia. During recent decades, they have penetrated to many outlying regions of the country as small businessmen, officials, and even as farmers. In contrast to current *Derg-directed migration*, Tigrean migration has been voluntary and individual- or family-based. The Tigrean natural entrepreneurial spirit could serve as an excellent example for a revolutionary regime that could moderate its dogmatic and unsuccessful Marxist regimentation of the economy—but not if the Tigreans are locked into another version of Marxism themselves.

It seems unlikely that its Marxism is the prime reason for the TPLF's relative success in gaining the support of a sizable proportion of the Tigrean populace. Past Tigrean history would lead to the conclusion that the momentum derives instead from Tigreans' strong sense of history and their perception of themselves as coequals with the Amhara (and on the scene well before them) in leading the Ethiopian empire.

If historical attitudes persist as strongly as some analysts argue, key features of the TPLF can be explained on this basis. Unlike the Eritreans, who have not tried to extend their movement outside their province,¹⁰ the TPLF moved into the Amhara-majority provinces to the

⁹ Dan F. Bauer, "Local-Level Politics and Social Change in Tigre: A Transactional Analysis of Adaptive Change," in W. Arens (ed.), *A Century of Change in Eastern Africa*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976.

¹⁰ The people of the Eritrean highlands are ethnically and linguistically indistinguishable from those of Tigre. Eritreans, however, seem to have much less inclination than Tigreans to think in broad political terms, for their area is a typical frontier region with

south in the same way Tigreans from the Middle Ages to modern times have sought to expand their influence over neighboring regions.

The rejection of separatism with emphasis on the need to reconstitute Ethiopia and establish a just government recognizing regional rights and ethnic distinctions is a natural outgrowth of the Tigrean view of Ethiopian history. In other words, the Tigreans, at least as much as the Amhara, are an imperial people who, despite their loyalty to tradition, think of themselves as having a right—and perhaps even a duty—to play a role in the larger political entity of which they are a part.

Tigreans also exhibit Ethiopian particularism. They do not readily ally themselves with external forces. Unlike some Eritreans, they do not try to claim they are Arabs and they do not directly seek the support of Arab governments. Would the Marxism outlast “victory” by the TPLF, whatever that might add up to? The question cannot yet be answered.

OTHER NORTHERN MOVEMENTS

No single movement predominates in the northern Amhara areas. Several appear to both compete and cooperate in a countryside that is only sporadically subject to the control of the central government. The EDU has never recovered from its defeat in 1978 and has made no effort to recapture urban centers. Nevertheless, its leaders maintain a headquarters in Khartoum and have extensive contacts over the border with sympathizers in Gondar province. The EPRP, which has a diffuse leadership in Europe, claims pockets of supporters in Gondar, Wollo, and Tigre, who are still periodically denounced by the regime.

A relatively new group, the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement, appears to be an extension of the TPLF into Amhara areas to the south. Whether it actually has independent leadership is unclear. Credit for military actions, such as those directed against Lalibela (which is situated in a core Amhara area), has been claimed by the TPLF as well as the EPDM.

The All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement, *Meisone*, is a remnant of a Marxist party that originally enjoyed Derg support. It claims followers but not militarily active insurgents inside the country.

an ethnically and religiously fragmented population. Local leaders are driven to protect narrow interests. See Richard Caulk, “Bad Men of the Borders: Shum and Shifta in Northern Ethiopia in the 19th Century,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1984, pp. 201-227.

The Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Alliance (EPDA), an outgrowth of the EDU, claims sympathizers throughout northern Ethiopia as well as in the center and among the Oromo of Wollega. It does not, however, claim to be directing guerrilla operations on the ground.¹¹ It engages in extensive propaganda operations from London; these parallel similar activities conducted by EPRP, TPLF and various Eritrean groups from several European and Middle Eastern centers, as well as in the United States. All of these groups claim to, and some undoubtedly do, infiltrate propaganda material into Ethiopia.

Western famine relief operations in northern Ethiopia have encouraged all of these groups to greater activity. The EPDA has taken the lead in appeals for cooperation among all anti-Derg forces. Charismatic leadership and a simple, straightforward political program are still lacking. Proclamations by these groups tend to be filled with negative rhetoric but lack positive concepts around which resistance can coalesce for sustained action against the Derg.

Experience in similar situations elsewhere offers little reason to expect that Ethiopian resistance can be rallied to greater cohesion by exile politicians who are always prone to fall victim to their own rivalries and disagreements. Leaders and action programs around which dissidents and rebels can rally are more likely to arise from the inside, perhaps from among officials and military officers who have been supporting the government but increasingly sympathize with its opponents. Such internal resistance leaders are more likely to be encouraged by concrete expectations of support for new policies by foreign governments sympathetic to Ethiopia than by the urgings of exile politicians who despite good intentions are operating for the most part in a political vacuum.

The Afar Liberation Front continues to engage in propaganda and low-intensity operations in southern Eritrea and eastern parts of Wollo, Shoa, and northern Hararge. It enjoys Saudi support and has the sympathy of many Djibouti Afars. Its relationship to the EPLF is an uneasy one, since Marxism has no appeal to Afars. Afars have not attempted to challenge the Derg's control of the important transport route from Assab to the highlands. Given this capability, they would be important tactical allies of any group challenging the Derg for control of the central government.

¹¹It issued a new political program directed primarily against the Soviet role in Ethiopia early in 1985. Text in FBIS, *USSR Report: Political and Sociological Affairs*, JPRS-SSA-85-040, May 13, 1985.

VII. IMPLICATIONS OF REBELLION AND SEPARATISM

U.S. POLICY TOWARD ETHIOPIAN SEPARATISTS

Criticisms of Past U.S. Policy

Writers on international strategy frequently observe that the U.S. government, by failing to take effective action in 1977-1978, needlessly "lost Ethiopia." From this judgment emerges the complaint that by neglecting to support resistance movements in Ethiopia now we are missing an opportunity to recoup our losses.¹

Inherent in the very fact of these criticisms are the implications that (1) some forms of political action against autocratic and unsuccessful regimes are justified and (2) development aid should be conditioned on certain standards of political and economic performance. This is encouraging. Such positions were unfashionable a decade ago. Prevailing dogma then rejected and condemned political and economic interventionism, above all by the West. A sizable body of academic opinion still does. Such attitudes predominated at the time of the Ethiopian revolution in 1974.

If there was external intervention in Ethiopian politics during and immediately after the revolution, it was not by Americans or their European allies. No economic pressures were brought to bear on the military junta in the face of drastic shifts in economic policy and vicious anti-Western rhetoric. American development aid continued until the end of the 1970s and European and international aid has never ceased.

Western famine relief has grown to enormous proportions since fall 1984 and appears likely to continue indefinitely. But, as the *London Economist* has asked, does simply "throwing food" at the Ethiopian problem help much to solve it? Should we not be doing something more fundamental to help the people our food aid is keeping alive?

To date, evidence of political intervention by the West—even mild political pressure on Mengistu's regime—is meager. Arab money supplied intermittently to some insurgent and separatist movements hardly amounts to a Western program to undermine "Ethiopian socialism." It is undermining itself.

¹Occasionally the criticism is broadened to include America's European allies. They are additionally condemned for mindlessly bolstering the pro-Soviet military regime by providing generous economic development assistance with no strings attached.

Are the activists' criticisms of past U.S. inaction valid? Should we be supporting all or most of the rebel and separatist movements resisting the Derg? If Afghan rebels deserve help -- even if we do not expect them to win against the Soviets -- should we not also help the rebels in Ethiopia?

The first question can be answered in the affirmative only if we take the problem back to the beginning of the Ethiopian revolution. Americans (and Europeans too, perhaps) might have tried to influence its course in the early stages. As evidence of eastern orientation and internal oppression mounted, pressures might have been increased, up to and including reducing or terminating military and economic aid. The impact of such actions can now only be judged hypothetically, but they might have kept Ethiopia from becoming a Soviet client state. This issue is now one primarily for historians, not policymakers, to debate.

Limited U.S. Options

The choices the U.S. government faced in 1977-1978 were predetermined by the situation that had evolved up to that time. Nothing that had already been done -- or not done -- could be reversed. The Carter administration's policy choices included backing the Somali invasion, significantly supporting the Eritrean insurgency, and supporting the other insurgencies in Ethiopia.

These policy choices were all, in effect, interlinked, for all three together or any one alone implied abandonment of support for the integrity of the Ethiopian state -- a reversal of previous U.S. policy on this fundamental issue extending back to the time of the Italian invasion in 1935-1936. None of these policies could have been effectively implemented covertly. They would have committed the United States to meeting open-ended requirements for military support, including large-scale provision of air and naval backing for military operations on the ground assisted by allied or U.S. forces.²

The political complications surrounding such support policies boggle the mind. The United States would have been undertaking commitments in behalf of self-proclaimed Marxist or socialist governments or movements that the Soviets had supported until a short time earlier.

Critics of U.S. "inaction" during the Horn crisis of 1977-1978 need to specify which allied forces could have been brought into Ethiopia if deployment of U.S. ground forces was -- as almost all would concede -- out of the question. Sudanese? Egyptians? Jordanians? Turks? Koreans? Even cursory examination of the complications that would be encountered in attempting to persuade any of these countries to make even modest commitments of manpower to fight in Ethiopia for causes as tenuous as Somali irredentism and Eritrean separatism underscores the impracticality of such schemes.

Siad's Somalia was (and remains) a highly authoritarian one-party regime. The Eritreans were then (and still are) rent by internal political rivalries, with the least democratic elements in the ascendancy.

Had any U.S. administration been impetuous enough to dive into the Ethiopian maelstrom in 1977-1978, who can seriously envision congressional backing for such adventurism? A modest, more promising and politically much less complex covert action program in Angola was cut off by the Clark amendment in 1975.

Perhaps the United States failed to weigh other policy choices in 1977-1978. All of the following actions were advocated, or implied, by critics.

1. Assist the Derg to defend itself against Somali invasion with a renewed military aid program.
2. Join the Soviets in establishing a multinational federation in the Horn of Africa, one in which all political rivalries would have been subsumed and eliminated.
3. Issue the Soviets an ultimatum threatening retaliation if they did not refrain from intervention and deployment of Cubans in Ethiopia.
4. Organize a UN cease-fire and multinational policing operation.

Pitfalls of Proposed Courses of Action

It would be unproductive to examine the implications of any of the above-listed courses of action in detail. To serious students of history and strategy, they all fall of their own impracticality and illogic.

Some Ethiopians continue to argue that the United States—their country's historic friend—betrayed them by refusing to renew military aid in summer 1977. They overlook the fact that Mengistu, not the United States, had arrogantly cut off the U.S. military assistance program only a few months before. Mengistu offered no apologies or promise of change of orientation in return for resumption of aid and, in fact, never actually asked for it. By this time, the Derg's murderous and oppressive policies had become so unpalatable to U.S. public opinion and Congress that it is doubtful that any administration could have secured backing for renewed assistance on a significant scale.

To be taken seriously, critics of U.S. inaction in the Horn in 1977-1978 must demonstrate (1) what actions could realistically have been taken by the United States and supported by U.S. allies; (2) that such actions would have been sustainable if announced as policy; and

(3) that they would have produced positive consequences today. No critic has been able to offer such proof. This is of more than theoretical interest, since it bears directly on the question of what could be done now or in the future.

COMPARISON OF ETHIOPIAN AND AFGHAN REBELS AND REBELLIONS

Let us turn now to the other two interrelated questions posed above: Should we be supporting rebel and separatist movements in Ethiopia? If we supply arms to Afghan rebels, why not to Eritreans, Tigreans, or Oromos? A comparison of the rebel movements in Afghanistan and Ethiopia and consideration of the challenges they face helps put these issues in perspective. I stress only highlights of the two situations in the discussion that follows.

Situation in Afghanistan

All Afghan rebels are fighting against (1) Soviet invasion and occupation of their country and (2) a puppet government in Kabul that would collapse the moment Soviet bayonets were withdrawn. All Afghans are united in loyalty to Islam and to the concept of an independent Afghan state; all are opposed to Marxism in all forms.

There are, of course, substantial ethnic and regional differences among Afghan rebels and variations in the intensity of Islamic orientation. There are also important differences in preferences for a future regime. Antipathy toward Marxism and Russians is so strong that it tends to overshadow all other differences. Rivalries among Afghan rebel movements revolve around leaders and personalities more than they do around issues.

All perceive maintaining the territorial integrity of the country as desirable. Practically everyone living in Afghanistan has felt the impact of the struggle against Soviet invasion. Almost a third of the population has fled abroad and unknown thousands have been displaced internally.

Even if we take the consequences of the Ethiopian famine into account, it seems probable that the economy and social fabric of Afghanistan have been more severely affected by the struggle taking place there than has been the case in Ethiopia. Regrettably, the potential for a favorable outcome of the struggle appears to be less than in Ethiopia.

Situation in Ethiopia

The Soviet Union did not invade Ethiopia. Even if some degree of Soviet clandestine support originally enabled the military regime in Ethiopia to seize power and maintain control,³ most Ethiopians do not perceive it as a puppet government, odious as they may find it. Mengistu's situation differs greatly from that of Babrak Karmal in Afghanistan. The Ethiopian's ability to maintain himself in power does not (yet, at least) depend on Soviet (or Cuban) arms.

Dissidents and separatists in Ethiopia are not fighting Soviet or Cuban invaders; they are rebelling against an indigenous regime. Many of the dissident movements are mildly to strongly separatist. Most of them do not cooperate or coordinate their activities. At least three major movements profess to be better Marxists than the Addis Ababa regime itself.⁴ Religion is for the most part neither a unifying nor a divisive factor. The Derg is generally perceived as antireligious, but it has treated both Christianity and Islam with deference and has thus, with a few minor exceptions, avoided mobilizing strong antireligious feelings against it.

All Ethiopian antiregime movements claim to want a less authoritarian, more democratic, and less centralized political system. What they understand by democratic is often hard to determine. The Marxist movements appear to mean Marxist-style "democracy." On economic questions (which are intrinsically the most important for the future of the country), none of these movements appears to have done much coherent thinking.

The distinction between the Derg's economic policies and those the Marxist-dominated movements would follow if they were in control is far from clear. The Yenan-style grass-roots communism that the EPLF and TPLF claim to have established in their areas has a romantic appeal to Western journalists and leftist intellectuals. Whether it offers any serious basis for the productive reconstruction of these societies is doubtful.

Although a sizable proportion of the Ethiopian population (primarily in the center, south, and southwest) does not actively oppose the regime, Mengistu could not count on these people to make personal sacrifices to support him. A change for the better is much easier to envision in Ethiopia than in Afghanistan, for the Soviets do not have the physical capability for intervention either to (1) prevent the present regime, or an outgrowth of it, from shifting its orientation or

Present knowledge does not permit a judgment on this question.

³The EPLF, the TPLF and the EPRP; the stance of the EPDM is unclear but appears Marxist as well; so is *Meisona*.

(2) maintain the present regime in power against a determined effort to overthrow it.

Differences Between Ethiopian and Afghan Situations

Unless the preceding comparison of the two situations has omitted some essential factor that is not apparent to me, the answer to the question - If we supply arms to Afghan rebels why not to Eritreans, Tigreans, or Oromos? - seems to emerge rather logically in the negative, though not without some qualifications.

The basic justification for supporting Afghan freedom fighters despite poor short-term prospects for success is that their struggle weakens and frustrates the Soviets, raises the costs of their invasion, and exposes them as enemies of human rights and national self-determination. If there is any hope of restoring an independent Afghanistan, it is magnified by the determined resistance of a large proportion of its population. Thus we encourage it in the interest of Afghans, as well as in our own strategic interest.

Resistance in Afghanistan discredits the puppet regime in Kabul and improves whatever long-term chances there may be of a negotiated settlement that could lead to Soviet withdrawal and perhaps neutralization of the country. Support for the freedom fighters in Afghanistan does not (to date, at least) confront us with any unpalatable choices as to future political, social, or economic system. Nor does it compromise in any way our commitment to the territorial integrity of the Afghan state. A broad coalition of free and Third-World countries (as well as China) sympathizes with and in various ways supports Afghan resistance against the Russians.

Support for separatist movements in Ethiopia, in contrast, would entail adopting a policy that envisions the breakup of a long-recognized state with which our relations have until recently been warm. It would put us at odds, legally and diplomatically, with most of Africa, the rest of the Third World, and almost all of our allies. It would leave the Soviets to pose as champions of Ethiopia's territorial integrity. It would demoralize Ethiopian nationalists (by far the overwhelming majority of politically conscious inhabitants of the country),⁵ whose

Separatism and extremism, lack of inclination to compromise, are always more characteristic of political exiles abroad than of people within a country under an oppressive regime. Political exiles exaggerate attitudes among people at home to make a better case for getting support abroad. Competition among them to serve as favored or sole channels of financial and material help to resistance groups feeds this tendency. Most Ethiopians who fled during the last ten years are not politically active abroad. Many have concentrated on economic success. Those who are most vocal abroad do not provide an accurate measure of attitudes at home.

support of the present regime ranges from lukewarm to noncommittal and who are almost all residually pro-Western and pro-American.

The argument, valid in Afghanistan, that by supporting rebels we increase the costs to the Soviets of maintaining control over the country is at best questionably applicable to Ethiopia. It may not be valid at all. The Soviets experience little negative effect from the activities of the separatist and dissident movements. They are widely suspected, in fact, of maintaining their own lines of contact with all the Marxist movements. Such suspicions extend high into the Derg.

The activities of the separatists and dissidents push the Derg into closer dependence on the Soviets. The immediate costs all fall on the Derg and the Ethiopian population. The fact that the West is making up the country's food deficit, which the Soviets have never tried to help alleviate, also relieves the Soviets of most of the economic costs of the Ethiopian relationship.

Even modest, piecemeal arms support for separatist and dissident movements would make them more competitive and less compromising with each other. It could also encourage them to adhere to unrealistic political and economic prescriptions. On this score, one finds much more disparity among movements resisting the Derg in Ethiopia than among Afghans resisting the Soviet invasion of their country. A policy of tactical support for separatism and regional dissidence in Ethiopia, if successful in the short term in strengthening individual movements, would make it more difficult for them to compromise and negotiate with any conciliatory regime in Addis Ababa.

It thus becomes apparent that few positive results could be expected from a program to support anti-Derg rebel groups in Ethiopia. For the most part, the criteria that justify support for Afghan freedom fighters do not apply.

COMPARISON OF ETHIOPIAN AND ANGOLAN REBELS AND REBELLIONS

How does the Ethiopian situation compare with the Angolan? The question can be answered rather simply. Savimbi is not a separatist. He is not a Marxist. He has a strong regional and ethnic base but his movement has always aimed at sharing power throughout the whole country. He aims to replace the Marxist government in Luanda with a government that will represent all Angolans and move toward the establishment of an open society and a realistic economic system.

How effective Savimbi might be in achieving his goals we cannot tell, but it is noteworthy that other rebel movements in Angola are also

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REBELS AND SEPARATISTS IN ETHIOPIA: REGIONAL RESISTANCE 2/2

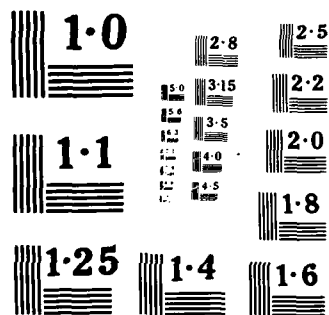
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oriented toward participation in the political and economic development of the country as a whole. The contrast with the Ethiopian situation needs no further underscoring.

WORTHY GOALS FOR ETHIOPIAN DISSIDENTS

If groups resisting the Derg's leadership and its economic and social policies would unite in their tactics and agree on the outlines of a program for the political and economic reconstruction of Ethiopia in accordance with recognized democratic and humanitarian principles, they would constitute more effective opposition. They would have the majority of the population of the country behind them. They could capitalize on the opprobrium the procommunist military regime has brought on itself by economic mismanagement, political oppression, and obsequious parroting of Soviet slogans and dogma. The famine, which caught the attention of the entire world, dramatized the incongruousness of the regime's activities, particularly the expensive circus organized in Addis Ababa to celebrate the founding of its Soviet-style party in September 1984.

Ethiopian exiles, united around a coherent set of objectives for their country, could bring their influence to bear in world capitals and international organizations, as Afghans have done, for sustained pressures on the military regime for change. As matters stand, the quarrelsomeness of the exiles and the pursuit of separatist and particularist programs work to the advantage of the Derg.

Marxist and Soviet formulas for development have been exposed in Ethiopia as disastrous. They not only do not work—they create, as one important commentary recently termed it, "A System of Ruins."⁶ World Bank studies have demonstrated over and over again that Ethiopia ranks among the African countries with the greatest potential for constructive, multifaceted economic development. By pulling apart, Ethiopia's peoples diminish the chances of all of them—Eritreans no less than Tigreans and Oromos—to realize their potential.

Several exile political movements have responded to the famine crisis by issuing appeals for the unity of all "democratic forces" in the country. Of these, only the TPLF and the Eritreans appear to control substantial territory in Ethiopia. A TPLF sympathizer recently stated:

[T]here may be a collective will in Tigre for national existence, but the material capacity to maintain that existence will be infinitely greater in a *unified but democratic Ethiopia*. The creation of an

⁶John Gray, *Times Literary Supplement*, London, December 30, 1983.

independent Tigre may be feasible but from the perspective of the Tigrean peasants, in particular, and the Ethiopian masses, in general, it is not a desirable alternative. The TPLF must recognize the indivisibility of the struggle of the Ethiopian peoples. Only through the formation of a united multinational front consisting of all patriotic and democratic forces are the nationalities likely to rid themselves of military dictatorship and its foreign mentors.

In August 1984, the TPLF released a somewhat more tentative formal statement at a press conference in Washington. The statement omits Eritrea from consideration, but the basic thrust is constructive.⁸ The recent emphasis by the EPLF on an approach similar to that of the TPLF is likewise hopeful.⁹

Rebellion, regional or at the center, with the ultimate aim of restoring and reinforcing national unity makes sense. It underscores the fact that the Derg has ruptured the national unity of the country and driven its peoples apart in the name of doctrinaire Soviet-style socialism and rigid centralism. Resistance motivated by the philosophy toward which the TPLF and EPLF appear to be moving is worthy of consideration for selective support by U.S. and other Western policymakers, but only as part of a coherent program for bringing about constructive change in the country as a whole.

⁸Gebre Tareke, "Resistance in Tigre (Ethiopia), from Weyane to TPLF," in *Horn of Africa*, Vol. VI, No. 4, 1984, p. 27.

⁹Proposal for the Formation of a United Resistance Force, *Horn of Africa*, Vol. VI, No. 4, 1984, pp. 61-63.

¹⁰See "Decreasing EPLF Intransigence?" Sec. VI, above.

VIII. U.S. POLICY CHALLENGE

The response of the free world to famine in Ethiopia has been remarkable. Figures of aid committed and delivered rise constantly; 1985 commitments exceeded \$1 billion. The U.S. Congress has shown no inclination to question administration requests for funds for famine relief anywhere in Africa; on the contrary, it has been doubling and tripling amounts sought. Privately gathered funds for famine relief from the United States and Europe for Ethiopia alone have been equally impressive. For the foreseeable future, private commitments will continue high.

Admirable as this response is, it is not without negative implications in several respects. The longer a large part of the population of northern Ethiopia is concentrated permanently in camps inside or outside Ethiopia's borders, the more the country will have to depend on foreign-supported relief operations and the more difficult will be the task of restoring the affected areas to normal life and productivity. Ethiopia must avoid the creation of permanent Palestinian-type camp conditions. We have the sad example of the refugee situation in Somalia, which has been overshadowed by Ethiopian developments but which belongs to the same set of disasters that Soviet interventionism in this part of the world has created.

The political effect of massive relief operations on the rebel and dissident movements is still hard to judge, owing to the lack of concrete information. To some degree, it has encouraged stronger resistance in the short term. The Derg, defensive, frustrated, and fearful, has shown no inclination to make concessions. The strain that has developed between the Derg and donor governments and organizations largely reflects heightened insecurity on the part of Ethiopian officials.

RESUMPTION OF DEVELOPMENT AID?

The Derg, in all likelihood, will never allow relief operators free access to rebel-controlled areas and will continue to press for aid for its resettlement programs. In U.S. terms, this means the resumption of development aid. Congress has already been called on to restore such aid, which was terminated in 1979 because of legislative requirements imposed by congressional actions in earlier years. These restrictions are still in force.

Given the Derg's persistence in pursuing unproductive agricultural policies, even if U.S. development aid had not been terminated at the end of the 1970s, the modest program then in operation would likely have encountered serious difficulty. American officials would have found support for state and collective farms illogical and unproductive. Some European countries have had less difficulty on this score.

With the passage of time and the accumulation of data, the world now knows that Ethiopia's socialist agricultural policies are failing. If these policies do not change, the food crisis can only worsen. The United States and its friends already face a situation in which they are, in effect, helping the Derg to survive without the Derg's accepting the full implications of its mistaken policies and without its feeling the full pressure for change.

The present approach to aid does not serve the best interests of the people of Ethiopia or of the free world. Congressional generosity and strong humanitarian motivation do not preclude strong congressional criticism of the U.S. administration for the failure to develop more comprehensive plans for encouraging change in Ethiopia.

Fortunately, the U.S. administration has not shackled itself with any commitment to maintain the present Ethiopian political order, or to refrain from contact with dissidents and rebels in Ethiopia. The United States has insisted on access to famine areas by U.S. officials, congressmen, journalists, and relief workers. It has also placed no limitations on the U.S. right to communicate with the Ethiopian people, who increasingly depend on the VOA, BBC, and Amharic service of Deutsche Welle for information.

The United States and its allies have nothing to fear from change in Ethiopia. This country need not decide in advance whether a Derg with new policies would be better than a complete change of regime, but it does need to make certain fundamentals clear. Doing so will accelerate political processes that are already in motion in Ethiopia. The main elements of U.S. policy should be the following:

- To press for basic change in overall economic policy, especially with respect to agriculture.
- To make clear that the United States will support an Ethiopian government that adopts a new course; the United States can do this by
 - resuming development aid on a significant scale
 - encouraging American private investment
 - considering the reestablishment of military aid.
- To straightforwardly uphold certain political principles, including
 - recognizing and supporting the maintenance of Ethiopia's territorial integrity

- encouraging measures that will give disaffected regions of the country a say in their local affairs
- standing ready to facilitate the mediation of quarrels with neighboring countries, including Somalia and Sudan.

Such an approach does not preclude dialogue with dissident and rebel movements in Ethiopia. Military assistance for rebels, dissidents, and separatists simply for the sake of "increasing pressures" on the Derg brings no clear-cut gain, however. It is likely not to have the effect intended. It is also a fundamentally immoral approach, and therefore over an extended time untenable.

The argument that the United States could pursue a policy covertly does not make it any more desirable, even in a tactical sense. Recent experience has demonstrated that no U.S. program of any scope can be kept covert, even when it is politically desirable and morally justifiable. The United States could never carry through on either a covert or an overt commitment to enable Ethiopian separatists to achieve their goal of breaking up the country and giving independence to segments of it.

Catering to separatist delusions serves no purpose. Tactical support of *Marxist* dissident movements on the argument that they are anti-Soviet also serves no purpose. They are anti-Soviet because the Soviets back the Derg rather than themselves. They are more anti-Derg than anti-Soviet. Many of them, in principle and to some degree in practice, espouse political authoritarianism just as distasteful as that of the Derg and advocate policies of nationalization and state direction of the economy of the same kind that have brought the Derg to the verge of bankruptcy. The Marxist movements all take strong anti-U.S. and anti-Western positions.

American policymakers find it difficult to escape the straightjacket of dealing with problems only in the framework of individual countries. The uniformly disastrous political history of the Horn of Africa countries over the past decade demonstrates that no problem in this part of the world can be regarded as purely domestic. Each country in the region affects the others.

The Somali-Ethiopian situation may be in a condition of stalemate that could continue for decades. Why should one accept that as a foreordained condition of life? If either country is worth assisting individually, logic dictates that there must be a case for trying to help both, in a context in which their capacity to interfere with and damage each other is reduced.

REGIONAL APPROACH TO HORN OF AFRICA

Ethio-Somali problems are not for the present, however, the highest priority in the Horn; Ethio-Sudanese problems are. The present sorry internal condition of both of these countries and the tensions that have built up between them are a compelling argument for a *regional approach* to this part of the world by U.S. policymakers—and by the entire free world.

Neither Ethiopia nor Sudan has a fundamental grievance against the other. Not even a minor territorial dispute has arisen along the extensive border between the two countries. The internal weaknesses of each have been exploited by outside forces to heighten tension and generate confrontations that work to the detriment of both countries. At a minimum, U.S. policy should seek a return to the kind of solution of southern Sudanese-Eritrean rebellion problems that Nimeiry and Haile Selassie, demonstrating real statesmanship, worked out in 1971-1972.

A much larger framework exists in which an openly declared, honest U.S. policy toward Ethiopia and the other countries of the Horn might expect eventually to succeed and to gain broader free world support. The United States need have no hesitancy in pointing out that more than 20 years of active Soviet involvement in the Horn of Africa have brought nothing but hardship and disaster for the peoples of the region, exacerbated all its political problems, and blighted its economic development.

The area bristles with arms, but the people who live in these countries enjoy less elementary physical and personal security than they did 25 years ago. Perhaps half a million people in these countries have died as a result of violence during the past two decades; another half a million have starved. At least two million have been uprooted and live as refugees.

The Soviet Union lacks both the means and the will to remedy or reverse this situation. It is the prime cause of it. It provided Nimeiry the bombs to attack Sudanese southerners in 1969-1970; it provided the Somali guerrillas the arms and ammunition with which they disrupted life in southeastern Ethiopia in the 1960s. Soviet proxies and surrogates stoked the Eritrean rebellion in the late 1960s and early 1970s and continued to encourage violence in Eritrea—both among the Eritrean rebels and through the Derg—during the 1970s. The Soviets provided the Somalis all the arms and major military equipment with which they were enabled to invade Ethiopia in 1977.

No U.S.-supplied arms enabled any Horn country to commit aggression against a neighbor. During the 25 years of close relationship, U.S. economic aid to Ethiopia always exceeded military support. Since the

commotion of the mid-1970s, the United States has supplied the major portion of the relief assistance that has sustained the hordes of refugees Soviet policies have created: hundreds of thousands in Somalia and now millions in Ethiopia and Sudan.

In contrast to the blood that blots the Soviet record in the Horn, neither the American people nor the U.S. government has fundamental reason to apologize as a result of our involvement in the area during the past four decades. We have nothing to lose now by enunciating a basic policy for the area that reflects the best in both our experience and our traditions.

The Horn does not need more arms. Taking sides in the chronic quarrels of the region can only do all its peoples more harm. Military costs already represent an intolerable budgetary burden for every country of the region.¹ There is no moral justification for helping any of the weak, insecure, and undemocratic governments in the region devise more efficient ways of oppressing their people in the name of Marxism, Islamic fundamentalism, or any other excuse for tyranny.

The United States has every justification for pressuring, persuading, cajoling, and—occasionally, when circumstances permit—forcing these governments to stop regimenting and exploiting their farmers and provide them the minimal prerequisites to produce and sell. Free agriculture, with genuine state support of private initiative, can generate export surpluses in the Horn. The United States should badger all these governments into more productive investment of the development aid Western donor nations and international lending agencies are still providing them. The United States should propose regional development institutions and programs and promise support for them.²

The United States should encourage as many of its developed-world allies as possible to join in these efforts. Of course, the efforts will produce no immediate results, and this country may be derided for proposing them. But what does the United States have to lose by painting a vision that corresponds to American ideals and is at the same time realistically anchored in the formidable technical and scientific progress the free world has already achieved?

The peoples of the Horn know that Marxism-Leninism, "scientific socialism," and all kindred dogmas are hollow. Some of their intellectuals still pretend otherwise—but the real attraction of Marxism to them is power, not progress. The productivity of free world agriculture

¹Except Djibouti, where the French, with 5000 men, do the job.

²There are good ideas long on the books: irrigation and power in the Webe Shebelle valley; the same for the Blue Nile valley and for other rivers that flow from Ethiopia into Sudan. Some modest regional projects, including livestock development and locust control, stand even now as examples of cooperation.

now keeps several million people in the Horn from dying of starvation. Their only hope of becoming self-sufficient again lies not with Marxism, but with the West.

Bookstores in Addis Ababa are filled with Marxist-Leninist classics that gather dust—and with books on computer programming, management, and technology that are sometimes worn out from browsing long before they are sold. The Marxism that titillated their older brothers half a generation ago has no serious appeal to students on the campus of Addis Ababa University today.

When they have the chance, this new generation of Ethiopians will loosen themselves from the still incomplete and now faltering grip of the Derg and begin moving forward. They can lead the whole Horn to a better and more peaceful life. Any policy the United States can devise to improve prospects for this happening sooner rather than later is worthwhile. Any other is illusory.³

I have developed these recommendations at greater length in an article, "Dilemmas in the Horn," *The National Interest*, Winter 1985.

Appendix

THE DERG AND THE NATIONALITIES PROBLEM

Before the revolution, Ethiopian Marxist intellectuals and students occasionally dabbled with ideas of restructuring the country along nationality lines, after the pattern of the USSR or China. Some speculated about breaking up the allegedly outdated empire and giving independence to separate peoples. This toying with the nationality issue did not occur on a very high level of sophistication. It does not seem to have been consistently encouraged by the Soviets or their surrogates.¹

The Eritrean issue, in which the Soviets played an active, behind-the-scenes role in supporting insurgency through East European and radical Arab proxies and in which the Cubans openly propagandized the Eritrean cause and trained guerrillas, was not, strictly speaking, a nationalities issue. There is no Eritrean nationality or Eritrean language.

Eritrea is a patchwork of at least eight major nationalities, several languages (including indigenous languages, English, Italian, and Arabic) and three religions, some with subgroupings. Language and religious divisions overlap. Eritrean insurgents were sharply divided, partly on ethnic and religious lines, and these cleavages remain important today. Vague idealism about the "solution of the national question" permeated leftist debate after the revolution, but it did not become a major issue.

The imperial regime made minor concessions to nationalities on language use. It enforced the use of Amharic for administrative purposes and education throughout the country. English was the primary foreign language. This policy produced serious resentment only in Eritrea, where the principal northern language, Tigrinya, had been used during the Italian period and continued in use after World War II.

The Derg permitted and for a time encouraged the use of major regional languages for publishing and broadcasting. When the national literacy campaign was launched, people were permitted to qualify in several regional languages, as well as in Amharic. This practice

¹This section is excerpted from the author's *Communism in Ethiopia. Is It Succeeding?* The Rand Corporation, P-7054, January 1985.

continues. The Derg has never discriminated against Amharic, however, nor in any way restricted its official use. Moreover, it has not downgraded English.

As the Derg strove to impose Soviet patterns on most aspects of Ethiopian life, the question of the possible reorganization of the country along ethnic lines became pertinent. Mengistu came closest to adopting a Soviet-type nationalities policy on April 20, 1976, when he announced the "national democratic revolution." According to his proclamation,

under the prevailing conditions in Ethiopia, the problem of nationalities can only be solved when the nationalities are guaranteed regional autonomy. Accordingly, each nationality will have the right to decide on matters prevailing within its environs, be they administrative, political, economic, social or language, as well as elect its own leaders and administrators. The right of nationalities for local autonomy will be implemented in a democratic way.

A proclamation issued on May 16, 1976, dealing primarily with Eritrea, expanded the concept. It declared that a study program would be launched for each of the regions of the country to determine

the history and interaction of the nationalities inhabiting them, their geographic position, economic structure and suitability for development and administration. . . . The government will at an appropriate time present to the people the format of the regions that can exist in the future. The entire Ethiopian people will then democratically discuss the issue at various levels and decide upon it themselves.

An Institute for the Study of Nationalities started to function in March 1983. In practical political terms, however, the nationalities issue has never advanced beyond the positions taken in 1976. The Nine-Point Policy on Eritrea enunciated that year has long been moribund, though never reversed.

Restructuring the country on nationality lines would require a degree of control the Derg has never come close to establishing. It would involve myriad difficult practical problems, such as how to handle areas where several nationalities live intermingled. The Derg has had difficulty maintaining control over many of the 14 long-established provinces (now officially termed *administrative regions*).

No Ethiopian ethnic issue better demonstrates the dangers of applying the Soviet model than the Ogaden. Were self-determination to be applied, the Somalis of Ethiopia, who originally intermixed less with other nationalities than almost any other Ethiopian people, would have

Ethiopian Herald, April 21, 1976.

Ethiopian Herald, May 18, 1976.

a basis for association with Somalia. The government in Mogadishu, we can be sure, whoever might be at its head, would lose no time taking advantage of such a situation.

Any lip service to, or pro-forma imitation of, Soviet-style nationalities arrangements in restricted areas where experimentation might be safe carries with it far-reaching implications for Eritrea and the Ogaden and the further danger of appearing to conciliate other separatist movements. Thus the most innocent-seeming experimentation with nationalities has explosive potential. No wonder there has been none.

This lack of attention to the nationality issue does not appear to concern the Soviets. Soviet writing on the subject of nationalities in Ethiopia is remarkable for its sparseness and lack of content. The complexity of the problem is acknowledged in a study published in 1982, but the fact the problem exists at all is alleged to be the fault of the imperial regime and its supporters.

It must be admitted that during recent decades in Ethiopia separatist attitudes have grown stronger, provoked primarily by the reactionary assimilationist policy of the previous feudal-monarchical regime. Ethiopia's entry in the course of the revolution onto the path of broad democratic transformation and its choice of socialist orientation provoked bitter resistance by internal and external reaction. Feudal counterrevolution merged with various separatist movements which are encouraged and supported by various imperialists and Maoists, the activities of which are clearly directed toward the dismemberment of revolutionary Ethiopia.¹

The best quotation that Soviet writers have been able to find to demonstrate that Mengistu remains devoted to imitating the Soviet approach is so limp as to be meaningless:

Speaking in the Kremlin in October 1980, Mengistu Haile-Mariam stressed: "We Ethiopian can learn a great deal from the first socialist country. The Soviet Union is a big country with over 100 nationalities speaking in 130 languages who live in harmony on the basis of principles of equality and democracy."

The government in Addis Ababa has not changed the way it administers the Somali population of the Ogaden— even though the military situation there has for the most part stabilized and Somalia, thanks to the restraint imposed by its tenuous Western relationships, most likely will not undertake another offensive against Ethiopia, and even though

¹"Natsional'noye stroitel'stvo i ego trudnosti" in Anatoly Gromyko (ed.), *Sovremennyye problemy i vneshnyaya politika Efiopii*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya, 1982, p. 42.

Gromyko, op. cit., pp. 43-44, citing *Pravda*, October 28, 1980.

the Ogaden refugees are gradually returning to Ethiopia. Agricultural development schemes again envision resettling sizable numbers of peasants from central Ethiopia in the Ogaden.

As far as nationality issues are concerned, the revolutionary government's approach to resettlement does not differ in any essentials from that followed by its predecessor. Resettlement plans reflect Soviet practice only to the extent that they are strongly biased toward the formation of state farms and collectives and entail forcible movement of people. This represents a commitment to Soviet-style agriculture, with priority on state control over productivity; it has nothing to do with nationalities issues as such.

Facile Soviet claims to the contrary, the record to date would seem to indicate that the Derg's efforts to impose a Soviet-style political, economic, and social system on Ethiopia have resulted in exacerbation of nationalities strains and regional tensions. To make this observation is not meant to imply, however, that the overall concept of Ethiopian nationhood has been weakened by the revolutionary experience.

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